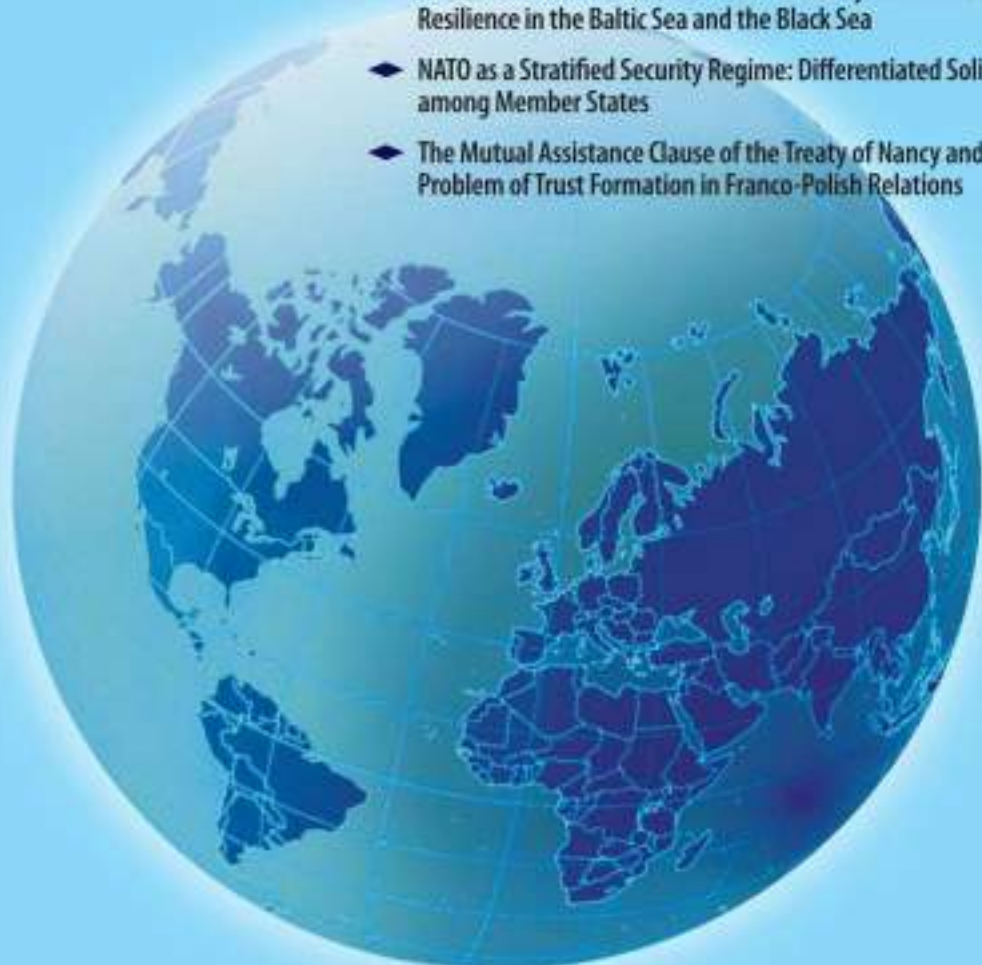


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REVISTĂ DE STUDII DE SECURITATE ȘI APĂRARE

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- Biological Hybrid Threats and the Strategic Adaptation of Security in the Fourth Industrial Revolution
- Critical Maritime Infrastructure as a Security Concern. Building Resilience in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea
- NATO as a Stratified Security Regime: Differentiated Solidarity among Member States
- The Mutual Assistance Clause of the Treaty of Nancy and the Problem of Trust Formation in Franco-Polish Relations



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SECURITATE INTERNAȚIONALĂ

Biological Hybrid Threats and the Strategic Adaptation of Security in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Maria NENOVSKA, PhD

Abstract

The present study examines the transformative impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on the contemporary security environment, with particular emphasis on the convergence between artificial intelligence and biotechnology. This technological synergy creates significant opportunities for enhancing public health and biological security, while also introducing new risks associated with the evolution of hybrid threats. Given the scope and complexity of the field, the analysis focuses on specific aspects, particularly the application of emerging technologies that are shaping the future of biological security.

Special attention is devoted to biological hybrid threats as multilayered and difficult-to-predict phenomena, the dynamics of which were clearly demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. These threats arise from the interaction of biological, cyber, and informational components, undermining public trust and exposing critical systems to vulnerabilities. Advances in the life sciences and digital technologies provide both effective tools for countermeasures and potential avenues for misuse.

The study highlights the need to develop cyberbiosecurity as an interdisciplinary framework integrating biological security, cybersecurity, and innovative scientific approaches. In the context of the increasing complexity of biological hybrid threats, recommendations are proposed in key strategic areas. Emphasis is placed on early warning mechanisms, coordinated information sharing, and enhanced cooperation among states, scientific institutions, and industry. These measures are essential for strengthening resilience and ensuring security in a global context.

Keywords: *biosecurity, biological hybrid threats, cyberbiosecurity, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, strategic security*

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1. Introduction

The qualitative leap in technological development, often referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, is a key driver in the transformation of socio-political relations and the shaping of the contemporary security environment. This process is characterised by convergence, in which scientific and technological domains are increasingly integrated, overcoming traditional boundaries and enabling the rapid transfer of knowledge, methodologies, and innovations. Of particular importance is

the accelerated development of artificial intelligence and biotechnology, together with their mutual synergy, which creates opportunities for significant advances in human health, the strengthening of biological security, and the expansion of the strategic capabilities of states and international organisations.

At the same time, these technological advances generate new security challenges by blurring the distinction between traditional and hybrid threats. While the convergence of advanced technologies and scientific disciplines offers substantial benefits, it also

increases the risk of misuse and unintended consequences, including hybrid operations, biological incidents, and disinformation campaigns. This context requires a strategic reassessment of the relationship between technological innovation and national and collective security, with emphasis on adaptive early warning mechanisms, integrated risk management, and multidisciplinary cooperation among governments, industry, and scientific institutions.

With the advancement of life sciences research, there is a growing need to systematically increase awareness among scientists and other actors in the research ecosystem regarding biological security risks and the dual-use potential of scientific results. This process is hindered by several structural and conceptual challenges, including the lack of unified definitions, which complicates the exchange of best practices; divergences in objectives and educational approaches among stakeholders; and differences in perceptions of authority and expertise. Additional constraints arise from already overloaded academic curricula and the competing priorities of researchers, who must balance scientific work with securing funding.

Thus, the Fourth Industrial Revolution not only transforms the technological landscape but also reshapes the principles of resilience and protection. It requires the development of new frameworks for biological, cyber, and hybrid security to ensure adequate preparedness and resilience of international alliances, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Given the increasing complexity, convergence, and systemic interdependence characterising contemporary security environments, a structured and conceptually grounded analytical framework is required to adequately capture the dynamics of biological hybrid threats. Against this background, it is necessary to clarify the methodological and theoretical foundations of the present study.

This research adopts a qualitative and conceptual research approach, combining analytical and comparative methods to examine the evolving nature of biological hybrid threats in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The analysis is based on a critical review of interdisciplinary literature spanning security studies, biosecurity, and emerging technol-

ogy governance. Methodologically, the study is informed by established understandings of qualitative content analysis as a research tool for systematic interpretation of textual materials and identification of recurring conceptual patterns¹. In addition, particular attention is given to the contextualisation of case-based insights and policy-oriented discussions, which contribute to a more nuanced understanding of threat manifestations across different institutional and geopolitical settings. This enables the identification of both common trends and context-specific vulnerabilities.

This paper is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that draws on the concept of hybrid threats as a multidimensional and evolving security phenomenon², as well as on resilience theory, which emphasises adaptability, preparedness, and systemic responses to complex risks³. It is further informed by the broader paradigm of non-traditional security, as developed by the Copenhagen School⁴, which expands the scope of security beyond the military domain to include biological, technological, and informational dimensions. In addition, the analysis incorporates perspectives on dual-use research and risk society⁵, highlighting the challenges associated with the governance and potential misuse of scientific advancements. Finally, the study engages with the emerging field of cyberbiosecurity⁶ as an interdisciplinary framework addressing vulnerabilities at the intersection of biological and digital systems. Together, these methodological and theoretical perspectives provide the basis for examining the strategic implications of biological hybrid threats and for formulating recommendations aimed at enhancing resilience and security.

2. Theoretical Background

Biological weapons and related materials have a long history of use for offensive purposes. During both World Wars, countries such as Germany, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom developed and experimented with biological warfare programmes. Thus, already in the first half of the twentieth

century, attention was placed on the strategic significance of biological agents. Contemporary technological progress, particularly in the fields of synthetic biology, genomics, and bioengineering, enables the integration and mutual penetration of scientific disciplines that until recently were practically separated. As a result, there is now the potential to transform a limited group of biological agents, including infectious and toxic substances, into effective weaponised tools. This process can be achieved through accessible methods of production and storage that may be exploited by organisations with criminal or terrorist intent.

The convergence of these processes gives rise to new and potentially significant risks. Among them are possible attacks on biological research and development facilities aimed at compromising the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information. In the broader context of international peace and security, incidents related to information and communication technologies outline a wide spectrum of consequences, ranging from minor to severe⁷.

The use of biological agents in contemporary conflicts, combined with the opportunities provided by technological advancement, contributes to the emergence of new dimensions of hybrid warfare. This expands the spectrum of threats that require comprehensive approaches to prevention, intelligence, and operational readiness.

In the contemporary technological landscape, biotechnology stands out as one of the leading cutting-edge disciplines, with applications across multiple fields, including healthcare, agriculture, industry, and environmental protection, aimed at developing innovative commercial products and services. In the field of defence, an expert committee examining the potential applications of biotechnology defines this area as one that possesses one or both of the following characteristics:

1. It uses organisms, tissues, cells, or molecular components derived from living systems to exert targeted effects on other living organisms.

2. It influences systems through the modification of cellular functions or molecular components of cells, including their genetic material⁸.

The pace of biotechnological development is so rapid that scientists and engineers often face difficulties in aligning the conceptual framework of what is included within the scope of the discipline. New subdisciplines related to emerging technologies continuously arise, creating a dynamic and rapidly evolving scientific environment⁹.

Despite the significant societal and healthcare benefits, this development also carries potential for misuse, including the creation of more effective and lethal weapons.

Biological weapons represent modern and extremely dangerous instruments of warfare. They are characterised by high strategic asymmetry, deriving from their relatively low production costs, accessibility of precursor materials, and feasibility of development in small-scale facilities, combined with their capacity for covert and delayed effects. The production of biological weapons may involve widely available pathogens obtained from legitimate biomedical research or natural sources, including soil, infected animals, or humans. Unlike conventional kinetic weapons, their deployment may remain undetected due to the potential for odourless, colourless, and slow-acting agents, which significantly reduces the likelihood of immediate attribution and enables attackers to maintain a temporal advantage. While some experts argue that technological and operational difficulties in the creation, production, and delivery of biological weapons significantly limit their practical applicability, an opposing view suggests that such weapons represent the “poor man’s atomic bomb,” with the potential to cause suffering and panic on a scale comparable to traditional weapons of mass destruction¹⁰.

A key operational feature is the possibility of dissemination in densely populated environments through minimal quantities of agents, which are difficult to detect and intercept using standard security measures. This, combined with incubation periods that delay symptom onset, creates conditions in which exposed individuals may unintentionally facilitate secondary transmission, thereby amplifying the scale of impact and transforming initial exposure sites into vectors of wider propagation.

The effectiveness of such weapons is further reinforced by systemic vulnerabilities, including limited public awareness, insufficient preparedness for biological incidents, and the high cost and technological complexity of advanced detection systems, which require specialised infrastructure and highly trained personnel. These constraints reduce the speed and effectiveness of early warning and response mechanisms, thereby increasing societal susceptibility.

In addition to direct human targeting, biological agents may be directed against agricultural systems and animal populations, with potentially severe secondary economic consequences¹¹. Such attacks can disrupt food supply chains, trigger price volatility, and generate broader socio-economic instability, including political and security repercussions.

Finally, the dual-use nature of biotechnology and the potential exploitation of population movements or other complex socio-political dynamics further increase the risk environment, highlighting the need for integrated preventive, detection, and response frameworks capable of addressing both deliberate hostile use and cascading systemic effects.

In light of the above, the unpredictability of future state and non-state interests in acquiring and using biological weapons poses a significant challenge to national and international stability, emphasising the need for integrated mechanisms for prevention, intelligence, and response readiness. Biotechnological progress, combined with the potential for hybrid and asymmetric exploitation of biological agents, necessitates the development of adaptive security and regulatory frameworks at both international and national levels.

Hybrid threats are increasingly displacing conventional challenges to modern security and defence systems. They manifest through a combination of lethal and non-lethal means, including conventional weapons, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials, terrorist actions, and other forms of asymmetric influence. The scale and diversity of hybrid threats today are unprecedented, as demonstrated by the crisis caused by the coronavirus disease 2019, an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona-

virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). This crisis illustrated the unusual and highly unexpected impact of an infectious disease on public and socio-economic relations.

Scientific advances in biotechnology provide promising tools for countering these threats, whether they originate from naturally occurring pandemics or deliberate attacks. At the same time, however, these same technologies create conditions for the development of more complex and potentially lethal biological weapons. The emergence of hybrid threats, a term developed approximately 26 years ago, underscores the need for an expanded analytical approach, as they combine military and non-military means of destabilisation. For the purposes of this study, the definition of the European Parliamentary Research Service is adopted, according to which a hybrid threat is “a phenomenon resulting from the convergence and interconnection of different elements that together form a more complex and multidimensional threat.”

Combined forms of threats are intensified by the lack of a unified political position and coordinated strategies, which hinders their prevention and detection. This necessitates preparedness for responses to problems and scenarios that are not yet fully explored, while simultaneously encouraging institutional creativity and flexibility. In terms of national and regional security, the implementation of coordinated decision-making processes between national authorities and the institutions of the European Union and the NATO, as well as the development of integrated countermeasures, are of critical importance.

Among the current characteristics of contemporary hybrid threats, their biological component is particularly prominent. Biological hybrid threats constitute a significant negative factor for national security and must be taken into account in strategic decision-making. They can be defined as biological phenomena resulting from the convergence and interconnection of different components of hybrid threats, which together form complex and multilayered risks to national and international stability¹². They have the potential to undermine public trust in science and health

systems, as illustrated by the spread of misinformation during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Biological security, in turn, encompasses two interrelated processes: prevention of the misuse of biological materials and associated information, and effective response to intentionally caused biological incidents. With technological development and the potential for artificial intelligence-based cyberattacks, these risks are increasing. In response, governments and international organisations are obliged to develop and implement new biological security policies to counter the potential use of biological weapons and biological hybrid threats. This includes enhanced information sharing, coordination of actions, and decision-making to ensure the protection of public health, international peace, and global security.

With the development of emerging biotechnologies, the issue of dual-use potential becomes critically important¹³. A decentralised and digitalised approach to bioengineering, combined with the capabilities of artificial intelligence, may lead to industrial sabotage, manipulation of scientific research, compromise of governance and information systems, and threats to health and food security. In this context, artificial intelligence becomes a key factor that simultaneously increases the potential of biological threats and the vulnerability of protective systems.

The response to these complex risks lies in the emergence of a new discipline known as cyberbiosecurity, which integrates multiple fields to identify and mitigate vulnerabilities at the intersection of life sciences, information technologies, biological security, and cybersecurity^{14, 15}. Cyberbiosecurity can be defined as a set of practices aimed at addressing potential threats from information and communication technologies to systems located at the intersection of the digital and biological domains¹⁶. More specifically, it includes methods, procedures, and measures to address these threats to biosafety and biological security. Cyberbiosecurity emphasises the need for an interdisciplinary approach, as the convergence of these fields has not been clearly analysed, and the lack of coordination increases the risk of ineffective actions and gaps in response systems¹⁷.

In accordance with the above, it can be summarised that the Fourth Industrial Revolution extends beyond a purely technological transformation, while simultaneously leading to a substantial rethinking of the concepts of resilience and security. This process necessitates the development of new analytical and practical frameworks encompassing biological, cyber, and hybrid security, in order to ensure an adequate level of preparedness and resilience of international alliances, including NATO. In its most general interpretation, hybrid security refers to the set of actors, processes, and interactions that operate outside the immediate control of the state, but nevertheless have a significant impact on the security of the state and its citizens. In a more in-depth sense, the concept emphasises the multiple and multilayered interconnections that these actors maintain simultaneously with state institutions, various social groups, and each other, forming a complex and dynamic security environment¹⁸.

3. Analytical Review and Considerations for the Future

In the short- and medium-term horizon, an increasing likelihood of the complex impact of different types of threats is observed, a trend clearly articulated in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. As a result, the contemporary strategic security environment is characterised by a high degree of complexity, dynamism, commercialisation, and growing competition between state and non-state actors.

The importance of deep and systematic dialogue among allies and partners is significantly increasing, particularly with regard to the formulation of future strategic positions, the identification of challenges, and the exploitation of opportunities. The strategic foresight process reflects the intention of the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation to apply a proactive and integrated approach to addressing future risks. In this process, the research community plays a key role by supporting the Alliance through in-depth analysis, interdisciplinary research, and the development of

innovative solutions aimed at adapting to the evolving security environment.

Allied Command Transformation performs a central function in defining the future military context by identifying key challenges and opportunities in order to stimulate innovation and maintain strategic advantage. In parallel, the community of allied strategic foresight experts is expanding, with an increasing number of member states and stakeholders within the Alliance allocating resources to the development of analytical and predictive capabilities.

In this sense, it is essential that Allied Command Transformation continues to function as a platform for the exchange of knowledge and expert assessments that supports the development of a shared understanding of security dynamics. This includes joint trend analysis, risk assessment, and the identification of threats and opportunities, as well as the development of alternative scenarios and long-term strategic perspectives. Such an integrated approach is key to enhancing the adaptability and resilience of the Alliance in a rapidly changing global environment.

The following future challenges must be addressed by NATO and its Allies, including adaptation to technological change, management of geopolitical shifts, addressing environmental risks, enhancing cyber and space capabilities, and ensuring Alliance cohesion and readiness¹⁹.

The exponential pace of technological development generates qualitatively new challenges for defence and security systems. Therefore, systematic monitoring and analytical tracking of trends in areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and quantum computing are key prerequisites for adequately forecasting their impact on the strategic environment.

At the same time, the development of effective policies and mechanisms for managing dual-use technologies becomes essential, as it requires balancing potential risks with the strategic opportunities they offer.

In this regard, the following priority areas for the Alliance can be identified:

- Monitoring and analysis of technological progress: ensuring continuous tracking of developments in key technological domains in

order to timely identify their impact on security and defence policies.

- Management of dual-use technologies: formulating comprehensive strategies to minimise risks and optimise benefits from technologies applicable in both civilian and military sectors.

- Integration of emerging technologies: strategic implementation of innovative technological solutions in military operations in order to maintain and develop a competitive advantage in the contemporary operational environment.

To ensure effective protection of its strategic interests, NATO should institutionally integrate biology as a separate domain within the framework of Multi-Domain Operations, and develop a comprehensive biological security strategy based on the optimal use of existing Allied mechanisms and organisational capabilities. Such an approach would reflect the growing importance of biology as an operational domain in which potential adversaries are already conducting targeted and strategically coordinated activities.

The institutionalisation of biology within NATO Multi-Domain Operations and the development of a comprehensive biological security strategy would strengthen key principles such as deterrence, resilience, and collective defence. Such a strategy implies the development of integrated systems for biological surveillance, bioforensics, and rapid response, enabling reliable identification of biological threats, including those of artificial origin. This would create the conditions for asymmetric deterrence mechanisms and coordinated civil-military responses.

In this context, it should be noted that China has officially conceptualised biology as a “new domain of warfare”, while Russia has consistently expanded and modernised its biological infrastructure near European borders, demonstrating potential for the use of chemical and biological means as instruments of hybrid influence. Therefore, there is a need to combine defence investments with transparency guarantees and strengthened control mechanisms, including the Biological Weapons Convention.

The NATO Biotechnology and Human Enhancement Technologies Strategy, adopted in April 2024, aims to ensure sustained technological superiority over peer competitors by promoting the responsible, legally compliant, and ethical application of biotechnology. Analyses in specialised expert literature emphasise that the strategic focus is directed towards the integration of biosensor systems supported by artificial intelligence for early detection of biological threats, the development of innovative protective materials for personnel, and the strengthening of mechanisms for the protection and management of sensitive biological data.

At the same time, a number of studies highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the long-term impacts of synthetic biology and human enhancement technologies, with the strategic planning horizon extending to 2045, reflecting the growing significance of these technologies for the future shape of security and defence.²⁰

NATO is increasingly articulating biotechnology as a priority area within its defence and innovation policy, allocating significant financial resources potentially reaching up to 500 million euros annually to support start-ups in the sector from 2026 onwards. This commitment reflects the Alliance's ambition to consolidate technological advantage by fostering high-value, strategically relevant innovation.

Within the context of NATO's first specialised biotechnology conference, Secretary General Mark Rutte emphasised the growing importance of the sector, noting that 28 promising biotechnology companies have already been funded under the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic initiative. He also highlighted the possibility of substantially increasing the budget of the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic in the medium term, with a potential multifold expansion of its financial capacity.

The existing NATO infrastructure, including research capabilities, intelligence systems, and logistics networks, provides a solid foundation for developing an effective biological security architecture. Key structures can be adapted to coordinate research, public-private partnerships, and interoperability, while the expansion of specialised centres of expertise

would enable the development of capabilities for biological risk management.

However, effective implementation requires the introduction of a new operational model through the integration of biological security into joint exercises and early warning systems. By analogy with the cyber and space domains, the proactive institutionalisation of the biological domain is a strategic necessity for preserving the Alliance's operational advantage in the contemporary security environment.

4. Strategic Directions and Recommendations

In light of the increasing complexity of biological hybrid threats, a set of recommendations can be synthesised and conceptualised in the following key strategic directions:

First, emphasis should be placed on strengthening the information environment through in-depth and coordinated data exchange among allies and partners, combined with increased public awareness and media literacy. Such an approach is essential for limiting the impact of disinformation campaigns and for reinforcing fundamental democratic values.

Second, systematic development of intelligence and analytical capabilities in the field of biological threats is required, including the optimisation of intelligence-sharing mechanisms, the overcoming of structural deficits, and the enhancement of institutional capacity at the level of NATO.

Third, improving operational readiness requires deeper integration of the biological component into strategic exercises, as well as its linkage with the broader spectrum of hybrid threats. This implies strengthened interdisciplinary interaction and the development of adaptive response capabilities in a dynamic environment.

Fourth, strengthening civil-military cooperation and expanding stakeholder engagement are critical factors for the effective management of biological crises. In this regard, sustainable funding of defence capabilities

must be ensured, along with reliable communication mechanisms and strategic communication, including under conditions of uncertainty.

Fifth, it is necessary to accelerate interaction between the scientific community, industry, and the military sector in order to more effectively implement innovations and overcome existing cognitive and institutional barriers. This also includes the promotion of research activities, the development of medical countermeasures, and the establishment of scientific exchange as a key principle.

Finally, emphasis should be placed on enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure, particularly in the health sector, through strengthening cybersecurity and ensuring the continuity of medical services under conditions of hybrid threats.

Overall, these measures outline the need for an integrated, proactive, and long-term oriented approach to countering biological hybrid threats.

Conclusions

Given the unprecedented pace of scientific discovery and the exponential development of biotechnology, armed forces must fundamentally transform their approaches to innovation and capability development. This requires the establishment of sustainable partnerships with the rapidly evolving biotechnology sector, active participation in research and development, and the systematic integration of civilian R&D outputs.

In parallel, organisational and human resource capacities must be strengthened to ensure an adequate response to future biological risks and threats. Training life sciences specialists in biosecurity and dual-use issues represents a key approach which, combined with complementary measures, can significantly enhance biological risk management and overall biological security. However, biological risks remain insufficiently addressed in education and training, while awareness of the potential misuse of life sciences research for hostile purposes is still limited.

The pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 exposed structural deficiencies in states' preparedness to respond effectively to biological threats, including in hybrid scenarios, regardless of their origin. Although such threats are not new, addressing persistent gaps in defence planning and capability development requires sustained and deliberate effort.

Improving processes for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of biological security-related information is therefore essential. While lessons have been identified from recent crises—including the COVID-19 pandemic, terrorist attacks, and the war in Ukraine—their systematic implementation remains limited.

NATO should recognise biological security as a distinct operational domain, enabling more effective use of existing institutional and technological resources to counter biological hybrid threats. In the context of rising global biological risks driven by climate change, increased mobility, and rapid advances in biotechnology, the likelihood of future pandemics remains high, as recent outbreaks continue to demonstrate.

Therefore, strategic restructuring and the prioritisation of national resources are essential to building sustainable and effective responses to contemporary challenges, many of which are linked to biological security. More broadly, resilience to this complex spectrum of threats cannot be achieved during an emerging crisis alone; it requires a long-term, coordinated, and multinational approach grounded in close cooperation between governments and societies. Only through such an approach can NATO's core functions of deterrence and collective defence be effectively sustained.

Notes

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Suveranitatea teritorială a statelor: între fundamentele dreptului internațional și provocările revizionismului contemporan

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Abstract

This article examines the metamorphosis of the concept of territorial sovereignty from the perspective of contemporary international law, marking the transition from the medieval patrimonial view to the peremptory regime established by the UN Charter. The study explores the constant tension between the principle of territorial integrity and the right to self-determination, utilising an analysis of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) jurisprudence (from the Island of Palmas case to the Kosovo Advisory Opinion). In the context of recent military aggressions and the resurgence of political transactionalism, the paper demonstrates that any border change achieved through force or without consulting the population is legally null and void, as it contravenes jus cogens norms. The conclusions emphasise the need to strengthen erga omnes obligations and non-recognition mechanisms with regard to territorial acquisitions that are non-compliant with the international law, in order to prevent the erosion of the global legal order.

Keywords: territorial sovereignty, jus cogens, territorial integrity, self-determination, ICJ jurisprudence, annexation, erga omnes obligations

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I. Introducere

Începând cu 24 octombrie 1945, data intrării în vigoare a *Cartei Națiunilor Unite*, dreptul internațional contemporan a consacrat definitiv suveranitatea statelor asupra propriilor teritorii, în rândul principiilor de *jus cogens*¹. Astfel, timp de aproape opt decenii, singura modalitate licită de dobândire a unor teritorii a fost organic legată de dreptul la autodeterminare al popoarelor consacrat în *Cartă* și de voința suverană, liber exprimată a acestora în ceea ce privește teritoriul locuit.

Ultimii ani au readus, însă, în actualitate, problema suveranității teritoriale, având în

vedere faptul că unii actori internaționali fie clamează recunoașterea suveranității asupra unor teritorii dobândite prin ocupație militară, ca urmare a unor agresiuni împotriva altor state (Rusia vs Ucraina), fie repun pe agenda internațională problema dobândirii de teritorii pe baze tranzacționale (SUA).

Întrebarea care se pune este dacă aceste modalități de dobândire a teritoriului sunt licite din perspectiva dreptului internațional actual.

Din perspectivă istorică, tranzacționarea teritoriilor ține de perioada viziunii patrimoniale asupra teritoriului, viziune de sorginte civilă, specifică mai ales Evului Mediu, fiind asociată în special cu persoana monarhului.²

În dreptul internațional contemporan, teritoriul nu reprezintă doar un spațiu geografic, ci fundamentul material al existenței statului ca subiect de drept. De la intrarea în vigoare a *Cartei Națiunilor Unite*, conceptul de suveranitate teritorială a suferit o transformare radicală, trecând de la o dimensiune discreționară la una limitată de norme imperative (*jus cogens*). Astăzi, integritatea teritorială nu este doar un drept al statului, ci un pilon de stabilitate al întregii ordini internaționale.

Într-un context marcat de conflicte armate pentru teritoriu (Ucraina, Caucaz) și de o reînnoțare a „tranzacționalismului” politic, este important să analizăm dacă normele stabilite după cel de-Al Doilea Război Mondial sunt suficient de reziliente în fața revizionismului geopolitic.

II. De la viziunea patrimonială asupra teritoriului la suveranitatea teritorială modernă

Așa cum am arătat anterior, rădăcinile modurilor de dobândire a teritoriului se află în dreptul privat (roman și medieval), unde teritoriul era considerat un bun (*res*) aflat în patrimoniul personal al monarhului. În această paradigmă, suveranitatea era confundată cu proprietatea (*dominium*). Transferul de teritoriu se realiza prin mecanisme similare contractelor civile: vânzare-cumpărare, schimb, moștenire sau dotă.³

Trecerea de la viziunea patrimonială la cea a „teritoriului-spațiu” (în care statul exercită o competență, nu un drept de proprietate de tip civil) a fost consolidată după Pacea de la Westfalia (1648), dar a fost definitivată abia în secolul XIX și la începutul secolului XX, odată cu afirmarea principiului naționalităților.⁴

În dreptul internațional clasic, doctrina reprezentată de autori precum Hugo Grotius (secolul XVII) sau Lassa Oppenheim (secolul XIX - începutul secolului XX) identifica cinci moduri principale de dobândire a suveranității teritoriale:

Ocupația (*Occupatio*) sau **descoperirea originară** reprezenta dobândirea unui teritoriu care nu aparținea niciunui alt stat (*terra*

nullius). De asemenea, ocupația era considerată ca fiind titlu legal de dobândire a unui teritoriu și în cazul teritoriilor abandonate (*res derelictus*). Mai târziu, în doctrină, dar și în dreptul pozitiv, pentru ca ocupația să devină operantă, a fost stabilită drept condiție esențială stăpânirea efectivă, adică exercitarea reală și continuă a autorității statale asupra unui teritoriu. Amintim în acest sens Actul General al Conferinței de la Berlin (1885)⁵ și jurisprudența internațională de până în 1945 (cf. Cauza *Insula Palmas*, 1928).⁶

În prezent, acest mod de dobândire de teritorii este practic desuet, având în vedere faptul că nu mai există teritorii care să poată fi considerate *res nullius*, cu excepția Antarcticii, al cărei statut este stabilit prin Tratatul semnat la Washington, la 1 decembrie 1959.

În realitate, chiar și la momentul la care dreptul internațional consacra ocupația drept mod licit de dobândire, nu existau teritorii fără stăpân. Această construcție juridică a fost, în fapt, un artificiu al puterilor coloniale europene prin care acestea își extindeau suveranitatea asupra unor teritorii care nu le aparțineau. Reținem în sprijinul celor afirmate o opinie împărtășită de o parte a doctrinei dreptului internațional, potrivit căreia „conform concepțiilor eurocentriste tradiționale privind dobândirea de teritorii, teritoriile ocupate de o colectivitate umană neorganizată în formele statale cunoscute de civilizația europeană («teritorii neorganizate în stat») erau echivalente cu teritoriile fără stăpân”.⁷

Prin *Avizul consultativ al Curții Internaționale de Justiție (CIJ) din 16 octombrie 1975 cu privire la Sahara Occidentală*⁸, Curtea a stabilit în unanimitate că Sahara Occidentală nu era *terra nullius* în momentul colonizării de către Spania. Teritoriul era locuit de triburi nomade organizate social și politic, reprezentate de șefi capabili să acționeze în numele lor. Prin urmare, CIJ a infirmat abordările potrivit cărora teritoriile locuite de o colectivitate umană neorganizată în formele statale cunoscute de civilizația europeană trebuie asimilate teritoriilor fără stăpân.

Un alt mod de a dobândi noi porțiuni de teritoriu, consacrat în dreptul internațional clasic, este **accesiunea**. Aceasta nu ridică, în

genere, controvers deosebite, reprezentând o dobândire prin cauze naturale (de exemplu, formarea unei insule în marea teritorială, aluviuni). Deși accesiuinea este un „just titlu”, este rar invocată pentru teritorii vaste, fiind mai degrabă relevantă pentru ajustări de frontieră sau pentru stabilirea suveranității asupra unor porțiuni noi de pământ apărute adiacent teritoriului deja existent.⁹

În dreptul internațional clasic, **cesiunea** reprezenta transferul suveranității de la un stat la altul, prin semnarea unui document bilateral (de regulă, tratat). Din punct de vedere istoric, cesiunea putea fi oneroasă (de exemplu, achiziția Louisianei de la Franța de către Statele Unite în 1803, sau vânzarea Alaskăi de către Rusia către SUA, în 1867), sau gratuită. Chiar dacă cesiunea „este o modalitate pașnică de dobândire a titlului teritorial, nu a mai apărut în practica statelor.”¹⁰

Unul dintre cele mai controversate moduri de dobândire de teritorii a fost **prescripția achizitivă**, care a fost definită ca fiind exercitarea suveranității asupra unui teritoriu aparținând altui stat, pe o perioadă lungă de timp, fără ca statul titular să protesteze.¹¹

Nu în ultimul rând, un mod de dobândire a teritoriului, cunoscut din cele mai vechi timpuri, a fost **cucerirea (anexiunea)**. Cuceririle sau anexiunile au fost considerate licite, atâta vreme cât războiul a fost considerat un mijloc licit de rezolvare a diferendelor. Odată cu Pactul Briand-Kellogg (1928) și, ulterior, *Carta ONU* (1945), recurgerea la forță a fost scoasă în afara legii și, prin urmare, un asemenea mod de dobândire a suveranității asupra unui teritoriu este ilicit.

După 1945, „în dreptul internațional contemporan s-a impus **principiul fundamental al suveranității teritoriale**.”¹²

Viziunea modernă asupra suveranității teritoriale a fost conturată printr-o serie de decizii adoptate de CII și predecesora sa, Curtea Permanentă de Justiție Internațională¹³ (CPJI), care au stabilit criteriile fundamentale prin care un stat poate reclama suveranitatea asupra unui teritoriu, punând accent pe echilibrul dintre titlul juridic și stăpânirea efectivă (exercitarea reală și continuă a autorității asupra teritoriului).

Astfel, **Cauza Insula Palmas (SUA vs Olanda, 1928)**, deși este o decizie arbitrală, rămâne un reper istoric în dreptul internațional în materie teritorială. Arbitrul Max Huber a statuat că descoperirea unui teritoriu nu oferă decât un „titlu imperfect”, care trebuie consolidat prin exercitarea reală și continuă a funcțiilor statale. Huber a subliniat că „suveranitatea teritorială implică dreptul exclusiv de a exercita activități statale”, iar acest drept are ca revers obligația de a proteja și drepturile altor state în interiorul aceluia teritoriu.¹⁴

Ce reținem în această cauză este că, dacă există vicii în titlul statului cedent, titlul statului căruia i se cedează teritoriul va fi, la rândul său, afectat de aceleași vicii; acest lucru este exprimat prin maxima latină *nemo dat quod non habet* (nimeni nu dă ceea ce nu are). De exemplu, în cazul Insulei Palmas, Spania cedase Insulele Filipine Statelor Unite prin Tratatul de la Paris din 1898, care descria insula ca făcând parte din Filipine. Dar, când Statele Unite au încercat să ia în posesie insula, au găsit-o sub control olandez. În arbitrajul care a urmat între Statele Unite și Țările de Jos, Statele Unite au susținut că insula aparținuse Spaniei înainte de 1898 și că Statele Unite o achiziționaseră de la Spania prin cesiune. Arbitrul Max Huber a susținut că, chiar dacă Spania ar fi avut inițial suveranitatea asupra insulei, Olanda o administrase încă de la începutul secolului XVIII, înlocuind, astfel, Spania, ca suverană asupra teritoriului respectiv. Întrucât Spania nu avea titlu asupra insulei în 1898, Statele Unite nu puteau dobândi titlul de la Spania.¹⁵

Cauza Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodgia vs. Thailanda, 1962) a evidențiat importanța stabilității frontierelor. Curtea a decis că Thailanda, prin faptul că nu a formulat obiecții timp îndelungat față de o hartă franceză, care plasa templul în Cambodgia, a consimțit tacit la acea frontieră (aplicând principiul *estoppel*)¹⁶.

„Chiar dacă ar fi vreo îndoială cu privire la acceptarea hărții de către Siam (Thailanda, n.n.) în 1908, și, în consecință, cu privire la frontiera indicată în hartă, Curtea consideră, în lumina cursului subsecvent al evenimentelor, că Thailanda ar fi împiedicată prin conduita sa să susțină că nu a acceptat harta. Pentru o perioadă de peste cincizeci de ani, Thailanda

s-a bucurat de beneficiile pe care i le-a conferit Tratatul din 1904, chiar dacă acest beneficiu ar fi doar o frontieră stabilă. Franța, și prin ea Cambodgia, s-au întemeiat pe acceptarea de către Thailanda a hărții. Întrucât Thailanda nu poate să susțină că a fost în eroare, este irelevant dacă întemeierea pe hartă a avut la bază impresia că harta era corectă. În prezent, nu mai este permis Thailandeii, în timp ce continuă să beneficieze de reglementarea frontierei, să nege că a consimțit la aceasta. Curtea consideră că Thailanda a acceptat într-adevăr harta din Anexa 1 ca reprezentând rezultatul activității de delimitare, și prin aceasta a recunoscut linia din hartă ca reprezentând linia de frontieră, ceea ce are efectul plasării templului Preah Vihear în teritoriul cambodgian. Curtea consideră că, privită în ansamblu, conduita subsecventă a Thailandeii confirmă acceptarea sa inițială, și că actele Thailandeii pe teren nu sunt suficiente pentru a o nega. Ambele părți, prin conduita lor, au recunoscut linia și, prin urmare, au agreeat ca aceasta să fie linia de frontieră.”¹⁷

În opinia noastră, faptul cel mai important care trebuie reținut în această cauză este acela că CIJ a subliniat că, în dreptul internațional, stabilitatea și caracterul definitiv al frontierelor sunt obiective majore, menite să prevină conflictele.

În **Cauza Burkina Faso vs Mali (1986)**, Curtea a analizat modul în care granițele administrative ale fostelor colonii devin frontiere internaționale la momentul independenței. Acest principiu are ca scop înghețarea „fotografiei teritoriale” pentru a evita vidul de suveranitate și războaiele civile. CIJ a declarat că *uti possidetis* este un principiu general al dreptului internațional, legat de fenomenul accesului la independență, prevalând asupra revendicărilor bazate pe efectivitate, dacă titlul juridic colonial este clar.¹⁸

III. Interdicția dobândirii de teritorii prin forță în dreptul contemporan

Articolul 2 alin. (4) din *Carta ONU*, care prevede că „toți Membrii Organizației se vor

abține, în relațiile lor internaționale, de la recurgerea la amenințarea cu forța sau la folosirea ei, fie împotriva integrității teritoriale ori independenței politice a vreunui stat, fie în orice alt mod incompatibil cu scopurile Națiunilor Unite”, reprezintă o normă de *jus cogens*, deci o normă imperativă. Orice teritoriu ocupat prin forță rămâne, din punct de vedere juridic, sub suveranitatea statului agresat, indiferent de durata ocupației sau de măsurile administrative luate de ocupant, întrucât dobândirea de teritorii prin utilizarea forței nu poate constitui just titlu, având în vedere principiul *ex injuria jus non oritur* (dreptul nu se poate naște din nedreptate). Astfel, principiul integrității teritoriale, consacrat de art. 2 alin. (4) din *Carta ONU*, anulează orice efect juridic al actelor de agresiune, iar dezvoltările dreptului internațional modern, în deceniile de după adoptarea *Cartei ONU*, statuează că „nicio dobândire teritorială derivată din amenințarea cu forța sau din folosirea forței nu va fi recunoscută ca licită”.¹⁹

Cazul agresiunii Rusiei împotriva Ucrainei este exemplul cel mai recent de încălcare flagrantă a acestui principiu. Tentativele de anexare (de exemplu, Crimeea în 2014, sau regiunile din estul Ucrainei începând cu 2022) sunt considerate nule din punct de vedere juridic de către marea majoritate a comunității internaționale, aplicându-se așa-numita „Doctrină Stimson”²⁰ cu privire la nerecunoașterea modificărilor teritoriale obținute prin forță.²¹

În acest sens s-a dezvoltat, de altfel, și jurisprudența CIJ care, de exemplu, în **Cauza Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (2005)**, reține faptul că Uganda, ca putere ocupantă, nu a dobândit suveranitatea asupra părților din teritoriul Republicii Democrate Congo (RDC), ci a rămas responsabilă pentru încălcările drepturilor omului comise acolo. Curtea a clarificat că ocupația militară este, de fapt, o situație tranzitorie, care nu poate transfera titlul juridic.²²

Conform **Proiectului de Articole al Comisiei de Drept Internațional a ONU privind răspunderea statelor (2001)**²³, statele lumii au obligația de a nu recunoaște situațiile create prin forță. În opinia noastră, aceasta nu este o opțiune politică, ci o obligație juridică *erga omnes*.²⁴ De exemplu, nerecunoașterea

anexării Crimei de către comunitatea internațională este o aplicare directă a acestui principiu, vizând izolarea juridică a actului de agresiune.

IV. Autodeterminarea popoarelor și integritatea teritorială

Tensiunea dintre dreptul popoarelor la autodeterminare și principiul integrității teritoriale a statelor reprezintă axul sensibil al ordinii juridice internaționale. Dacă integritatea teritorială (consacrată de art. 2 alin. 4 din *Cartă*) vizează conservarea statu-quo-ului și stabilitatea frontierelor, autodeterminarea (art. 1 din *Cartă*) este, prin natura sa, un principiu dinamic, generator de schimbare.

Doctrina modernă, sprijinită de **Declarația Adunării Generale a ONU privind principiile dreptului internațional 2625 (1970)**, a încercat să rezolve această antinomie prin distincția dintre autodeterminarea internă (dreptul unui popor de a-și urmări dezvoltarea politică, economică și culturală în cadrul statului existent) și autodeterminarea externă (dreptul de a părăsi statul existent și de a forma o entitate nouă sau de a se uni cu un alt stat). Aceasta din urmă este limitată, în principiu, la contextul decolonizării sau al ocupației străine.²⁵

O problemă de maximă actualitate este dacă un grup minoritar are dreptul la secesiune atunci când este supus unor violări masive ale drepturilor omului sau unei excluderi politice totale. Această teorie, numită *remedial secession* (secesiune remedială, trad. n.), a fost intens dezbătută în contextul **Opinii Consultative a CIJ privind Declarația de Independență a Kosovo (2010)**.

Curtea a adoptat o poziție extrem de prudentă, afirmând că practica statelor din secolul XVIII până în secolul XX nu indică faptul că dreptul internațional conține vreo interdicție în privința declarațiilor de independență, dar fără a confirma existența unui „drept la secesiune” în afara cadrului decolonizării. Totuși, CIJ a subliniat că principiul integrității teritoriale se aplică în relațiile dintre state, nu în raporturile dintre un stat și actori interni, lăsând, astfel, o zonă gri interpretativă pe care diverse entități separatiste au încercat să o exploateze.²⁶

Spre deosebire de precedentul Kosovo, unde a existat o administrație internațională prelungită (UNMIK) și dovezi clare de persecuție etnică sistematică, încercările Federației Ruse de a justifica anexările din Ucraina prin „autodeterminare” sunt viciate juridic. Doctrina subliniază că autodeterminarea nu poate fi invocată ca pretext pentru a acoperi o agresiune externă. Un referendum organizat în prezența trupelor străine încalcă standardele minime de validitate a consimțământului (libertatea de exprimare, absența constrângerii), transformând actul într-o „anexare deghizată”.²⁷

Suveranitatea nu vizează doar controlul politic, ci și dreptul exclusiv de exploatare a bogățiilor subsolului și ale platoului continental. Rezoluția 1803 (XVII) a AG ONU din 1962 a consacrat principiul „suveranității permanente asupra resurselor naturale”. În teritoriile aflate sub ocupație sau disputate, acest principiu devine un instrument de protecție a populației civile.

V. Noile frontiere ale tranzacționalismului teritorial

Propunerile recente de achiziție a unor teritorii vaste (de exemplu, Groenlanda) sau ideea de a „ceda teritorii pentru pace” în conflictele contemporane (de exemplu, Rusia vs Ucraina) indică o revenire la o logică patrimonial-mercantilă, sau chiar o logică a relegitimării forței ca instrument de rezolvare a problemelor internaționale. Deși cesiunea prin acord rămâne teoretic posibilă, ea se lovește de bariere etice și juridice, în sensul în care populația nu mai este privită ca în trecut, drept un obiect atașat solului, ci titularul dreptului la autodeterminare. Un transfer de suveranitate fără consultarea voinei populare (referendum/plebiscit) ar fi nul în lumina dreptului internațional actual.²⁸ Mai mult, doctrina contemporană reține că limitele tranzacționalismului sunt dictate de ilicitatea obiectului (un stat nu poate vinde ceea ce nu îi aparține, de vreme ce nu are teritorii „în proprietate”, ci doar „în administrare suverană”), de dreptul populației de a se pronunța asupra oricărui transfer de suveranitate, exercitat prin necesitatea referendumului valid, așa cum am

arătat *supra* și, nu în ultimul rând, de ordinea constituțională internă²⁹ (majoritatea constituțiilor moderne, inclusiv cea a Danemarcei în raport cu Groenlanda, prevăd proceduri care fac imposibil un transfer bilateral fără acordul legislativului local și al poporului vizat).

În plus, în dreptul internațional contemporan, interdicția folosirii forței nu are doar un caracter prohibitiv, ci produce efecte juridice directe asupra oricărei tentative de modificare a frontierelor prin agresiune. Dobândirea de teritorii prin ocupație militară, chiar consolidată prin organizarea unor consultări locale (cf. Crimeea, 2014), nu poate genera titlu juridic valid în măsura în care actul originar este viciat prin încălcarea unei norme imperative. În acest sens, obligația de nerecunoaștere a situațiilor create prin încălcarea gravă a normelor de *jus cogens* reprezintă un mecanism esențial de protecție a ordinii juridice internaționale.

VI. Obligațiile *erga omnes* și răspunderea internațională pentru încălcarea integrității teritoriale

Unul dintre cele mai importante progrese ale dreptului internațional modern este recunoașterea faptului că anumite norme sunt atât de importante, încât încălcarea lor afectează toate statele, nu doar statul victimă. Astfel, în Cauza **Barcelona Traction (1970)**, Curtea Internațională de Justiție a introdus conceptul de obligații *erga omnes*.³⁰ Interdicția actelor de agresiune și respectarea dreptului la autodeținare fac parte din această categorie.

Consecința juridică este majoră în sensul că orice stat, chiar dacă nu este direct implicat în conflict, are un interes juridic ca aceste norme să fie respectate. Aceasta fundamentează legalitatea sancțiunilor internaționale adoptate de state terțe împotriva agresorilor.³¹ În contextul suveranității teritoriale, obligația *erga omnes* se traduce prin datoria colectivă de a proteja frontierele recunoscute internațional împotriva modificărilor forțate.

În doctrina contemporană, răspunderea statelor nu se mai limitează la reparații ma-

teriale. În cazul încălcării integrității teritoriale, dreptul internațional prevede obligația de a reveni la situația anterioară agresiunii prin încetarea faptului ilicit, retragerea trupelor, anularea actelor administrative de anexare (*restitutio in integrum*), garanții de nerepetare a conduitei respective, precum și contramăsuri colective, cum ar fi demersuri de presiune economică și diplomatică pentru a forța statul agresor să revină la legalitate. Totuși, conform art. 41 din Proiectul Comisiei de Drept Internațional amintit anterior, nicio contramăsură nu poate implica folosirea forței armate în afara cadrului de autoapărare sau a autorizării Consiliului de Securitate al ONU.³²

VII. Rolul organizațiilor internaționale în rezolvarea disputelor de suveranitate.

Consiliul de Securitate și Adunarea Generală a ONU

După declanșarea războiului de agresiune al Rusiei împotriva Ucrainei, în Consiliul de Securitate nu s-a putut întruni consensul pentru un răspuns adecvat, în conformitate cu prevederile *Cartei ONU*, din cauza dreptului de veto exercitat de Rusia. Statele Unite și Albania au înaintat un proiect de rezoluție, întrunind sprijinul a doar 11 membri din cei 15 ai Consiliului.³³

Dreptul de veto deținut de membrii permanenți ai Consiliului și exercitat de Rusia în acest caz a contrabalansat, astfel, în mod contrastant, voturile din cadrul Adunării Generale a ONU a 141 de state membre care au votat în favoarea unei rezoluții care reafirmă suveranitatea, independența și integritatea teritorială a Ucrainei.³⁴

De vreme ce Consiliul de Securitate este adesea blocat de mecanismul dreptului de veto (în special când un membru permanent este implicat direct în disputa teritorială), s-a încercat preluarea de către Adunarea Generală a unui rol normativ prin rezoluțiile de tip „Uniting for Peace”³⁵. Astfel, Rezoluțiile ES-11/1 și ES-11/4 privind Ucraina reprezintă „jurisprudența politică” a comunității internaționale, declarând ilegalitatea anexărilor și reconfirmând

că suveranitatea teritorială nu poate fi tranzacționată prin forță.³⁶

Această situație a readus în prim-plan discuția despre necesitatea reformării sistemului ONU, începând cu Consiliul de Securitate. Astfel, într-o opinie la care achiesăm, soluția nu va fi o simplă reformă a Consiliului de Securitate, prin creșterea numărului de membri permanenți sau schimbarea sistemului de vot prin eliminarea dreptului de veto, ci „a sosit momentul să începem remodelarea Cartei ONU pentru o lume post-războiul din Ucraina. Nu ar trebui să fie nevoie de un conflict și mai amplu pentru ca statele să ajungă la un acord privind o Cartă mai incluzivă și egală. Statele vor continua să nu aibă o putere *de facto* egală, dar toate ar trebui să urmărească construirea unui sistem care să poată funcționa în beneficiul comunității internaționale în ansamblu, în cele mai complexe momente”.³⁷

Organizația pentru Securitate și Cooperare în Europa (OSCE)

Actul Final al Conferinței pentru Securitate și Cooperare în Europa (CSCE) de la Helsinki (1975) rămâne documentul de referință pentru Europa, cuprinzând așa-numitul „decalog” de principii, printre care și inviolabilitatea frontierelor.³⁸ După destinderea relațiilor Est-Vest și adoptarea Cartei de la Paris pentru o nouă Europă (1990) care reconfirmă principiile Actului Final, OSCE a dezvoltat concepte precum „măsurile de creștere a încrederii și securității/confidence and security building measures (CSBMs)”, menite să prevină transformarea disputelor, inclusiv a celor teritoriale, în conflicte deschise. Încălcarea acestor principii, cu precădere în ultima decadă, reprezintă nu doar o criză regională, ci o prăbușire a întregii arhitecturi de securitate europene.

Mai ales după războiul de agresiune declanșat de Kremlin împotriva Ucrainei, „ideea centrală a CSCE, de a realiza securitatea în Europa prin consolidarea încrederii și cooperarea între toate statele, a fost zdruncinată. Rusia duce un război împotriva Ucrainei și se vede în conflict cu «Occidentul colectiv». OSCE și fundamentele sale contractuale au fost slăbite, încrederea s-a pierdut, iar procesele de lucru au fost perturbate. Nu este clar ce se va întâmpla în continuare. Până în prezent, însă, niciun stat participant nu a pus la îndoială existența organizației.

OSCE are forumuri și instrumente unice cu care poate continua să lucreze. Trebuie să se pregătească pentru ziua în care va putea juca din nou un rol în politica de securitate europeană și în medierea conflictelor.”³⁹

Concluzii: Viitorul frontierelor în epoca globalizării și a revizionismului

În ultima perioadă, suveranitatea teritorială, ca principiu fundamental care a stat la baza ordinii internaționale, cel puțin în ultimele opt decenii, traversează o perioadă de redefinire profundă sub presiunea, pe de o parte, a globalizării economice și digitalizării, care par să relativizeze importanța frontierelor fizice și, pe de altă parte, a recrudescenței conflictelor teritoriale, care demonstrează că pământul/teritoriul rămâne „ultima frontieră” a puterii politice.

Așa cum am arătat în capitolele de mai sus, din perspectiva dreptului internațional actual, recunoașterea suveranității asupra unor teritorii dobândite prin ocupație militară, ca urmare a unor agresiuni împotriva altor state, sau prin intermediul unor tranzacții, nu mai reprezintă o conduită licită. Într-o opinie pe care o considerăm întemeiată, „nici unul dintre modurile istorice de dobândire a teritoriilor nu ar mai fi acceptat astăzi în sistemul internațional. Cucerirea (*debellatio*) este delegitimată, întrucât războiul de agresiune (care este instrumentul de cucerire) a devenit un fapt internațional ilicit; iar un titlu obținut în mod ilicit, prin utilizarea forței, nu ar putea fi considerat un titlu valid (*ex injuria jus non oritur*)”.⁴⁰

În ceea ce privește reziliența principiilor și normelor stabilite după Al Doilea Război Mondial, contextul actual demonstrează, fără dubiu, că orice acțiune care încalcă principiul integrității teritoriale a statelor are un efect profund destabilizator pentru pacea și securitatea internațională. Prin urmare, putem conchide că reziliența acestor principii și norme este afectată pe multiple paliere, având în vedere, pe de o parte, limitele acțiunii organizațiilor internaționale relevante și, pe de altă parte, conduita actorilor statali majori pe scena internațională.

Din perspectiva suveranității teritoriale, singurele opțiuni juridice pe care, mai ales

puterile medii și mici, le au pentru a prezerva, dezvolta și întări ordinea internațională bazată pe reguli, sunt următoarele:

a. consacrarea primatului legalității asupra efectivității, în sensul în care comunitatea internațională nu trebuie să permită transformarea ocupației de fapt în titlu de drept, indiferent de durata acesteia;

b. umanizarea suveranității, în sensul în care teritoriul nu mai poate fi separat de populație, autodeterminarea internă și respectarea drepturilor minorităților fiind singurele garanții pe termen lung împotriva secesionismului violent; și

c. interdicția absolută a tranzacționalismului fără referendum, în sensul în care „vânzarea-cumpărarea” de teritorii sau cedarea lor în schimbul păcii, fără consultarea populației, este nulă în dreptul internațional contemporan.

Având în vedere cele de mai sus, putem conchide că statele, confruntate cu crize fără precedent în ultimele opt decenii, sunt puse în fața unei opțiuni istorice, în sensul în care, fie întreprind demersurile necesare de întărire în dreptul internațional a instrumentelor care să asigure protecție principiului suveranității teritoriale, fie, prin acceptarea revizionismului, deschid calea către o lume a cărei ordine este impusă prin forță și nu guvernată de principii și norme de drept.

Note

¹ Art. 2 alin. (4) din *Cartă* face referire, în mod expres, la integritatea teritorială și independența politică.

² A se vedea Dumitru Mazilu, *Dreptul internațional public*, vol. I, Editura Lumina Lex, București, 2001, p. 398.

³ A se vedea Grigore Geamănu, *Drept internațional public*, vol. I, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1981, p. 162-163.

⁴ Ian Brownlie, *Principles of Public International Law*, 7th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 127.

⁵ *General Act of the Conference of Berlin concerning the Congo, signed at Berlin, February 26, 1885*, “The American Journal of International Law”, Vol. 3, No. 1, Supplement: Official Documents (Jan., 1909), p. 7-25.

Notă: Actul General al Conferinței de la Berlin, semnat la 26 februarie 1885, a oficializat „împărți-

rea Africii” de către puterile europene, stabilind reguli pentru colonizare și comerț. Acesta a introdus principiul ocupării efective, a asigurat libertatea de navigație pe fluviile Congo și Niger și a recunoscut Statul Liber Congo ca proprietate a Regelui Leopold al II-lea al Belgiei.

⁶ *Island of Palmas Case (Netherlands vs USA)*, Reports of International Arbitral Awards, Vol. II, 1928, p. 829-871.

⁷ Raluca-Miga Beșteliu, *Drept internațional. Introducere în dreptul internațional public*, ed. a III-a, Editura All Beck, București, 2003.

⁸ CII, Western Sahara, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports, 1975.

⁹ Peter Malanczuk, *Akehurst's Modern Introduction to International Law*, 7th edition, Routledge, 1997, p. 151.

¹⁰ Diana Botău, Valentin Constantin, *Drept Internațional. Partea generală*, Editura Hamangiu, p. 260-261.

¹¹ A se vedea Peter Malanczuk, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

¹² Dumitru Mazilu, *Dreptul internațional public*, vol. I, Editura Lumina Lex, București, 2001, p. 399.

¹³ CPJI a fost instituită prin Pactul Societății Națiunilor și a funcționat până în anul 1946 – anul înființării CII, în baza *Cartei ONU*.

¹⁴ *Island of Palmas Case (Netherlands vs USA)*, Reports of International Arbitral Awards, Vol. II, 1928, p. 829-871.

¹⁵ Peter Malanczuk, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁶ Acest concept inspirat din dreptul anglo-saxon constă în esență în faptul că un stat care a adoptat o anumită conduită sau care a acceptat o anumită situație este împiedicat („precluded”) să își modifice poziția, dacă alte state s-au întemeiat cu bună-credință pe acea conduită.

¹⁷ CII, Case concerning the Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia vs Thailand), Judgment of 15 June 1962, ICJ Reports 1962, p. 6, 32-33.

¹⁸ CII, Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso/Republic of Mali), Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1986, p. 554.

¹⁹ Declarația Adunării Generale ONU 2625 (XXV) din 1970 referitoare la principiile dreptului internațional privind relațiile prietenești și cooperarea între state.

²⁰ Doctrina poartă numele lui Henry L. Stimson, secretar de stat al SUA în timpul administrației Hoover (1929-1933), și este cuprinsă într-o notă diplomatică emisă după ocuparea de către Japonia a regiunii nord-estice a Chinei – Manciuria. SUA au trimis respectiva notă diplomatică Japoniei la data de 7 ianuarie 1932.

²¹ Malcolm N. Shaw, *International Law*, 8th Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 372.

²² CIJ, *Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (DRC vs Uganda)*, Judgment of 19 December 2005.

²³ Draft articles on Responsibility of states for internationally wrongful acts, Text adopted by the Commission at its fifty-third session, in 2001, and submitted to the General Assembly as a part of the Commission's report covering the work of that session. Yearbook of the International Law Commission, 2001, Vol. II (Part Two). Text reproduced as it appears in the annex to General Assembly resolution 56/83 of 12 December 2001, and corrected by document A/56/49 (Vol. I)/Corr.4; a se vedea <http://untreaty.un.org/ilc/guide>, accesat la 5 mai 2026.

²⁴ James Crawford, *The International Law Commission's Articles on State Responsibility*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁵ James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law*, 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 118.

²⁶ CIJ, *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 2010.

²⁷ Thomas D. Grant, *Aggression against Ukraine: Territory, Responsibility, and International Law*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 45.

²⁸ Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 190.

²⁹ A se vedea Anne Peters, *Statehood after 1989: "Effectivity" vs "Legality"* Revisited, în "Select Proceedings of the European Society of International Law", 2010.

³⁰ CIJ, *Barcelona Traction, Light and Power Company, Limited*, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1970, p. 32, para 33.

³¹ Un exemplu recent îl reprezintă sancțiunile Uniunii Europene față de Federația Rusă în contextul agresiunii acesteia împotriva Ucrainei.

³² James Crawford, *The International Law Commission's Articles on State Responsibility*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 242-245.

³³ China, India și Emiratele Arabe Unite s-au abținut, iar Rusia a votat împotriva.

³⁴ United Nations News, *General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine*, 2 March 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>, accesat la 6 mai 2026.

³⁵ La 3 noiembrie 1950, Adunarea Generală a adoptat rezoluția 377 A (V), intitulată „Uniting for Peace”. Adoptarea acestei rezoluții a venit ca răspuns la strategia URSS de a bloca orice decizie a Consiliului de Securitate privind măsurile care trebuie luate pentru a proteja Republica Coreea împotriva agresiunii lansate împotriva sa de către forțele mi-

litare din Coreea de Nord. Rezoluția prevede că, în cazul în care Consiliul de Securitate, din cauza lipsei unanimității membrilor permanenți, nu își exercită responsabilitatea principală pentru menținerea păcii și securității internaționale, Adunarea Generală se va sesiza în respectiva chestiune, în vederea formulării unor recomandări adecvate pentru „măsuri colective... inclusiv utilizarea forței armate atunci când este necesar”. După cum reiese clar și din limbajul rezoluției, Adunarea Generală nu poate fi niciodată un substitut complet pentru Consiliul de Securitate în acest domeniu, întrucât poate adopta doar „recomandări”, lipsite de forță juridică obligatorie (a se vedea *Uniting for Peace General Assembly resolution 377 (V). Introductory Note by Christian Tomuschat*, publicată pe <https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/ufp/ufp.html>, accesat la 4 mai 2026).

³⁶ Rezoluția AG ONU ES-11/4, *Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations*, 12 octombrie 2022.

³⁷ Ivan Levy, *The United Nations (In)Security Council: Time for Reform in a Post-Ukraine War World?*, publicat pe site-ul <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu>, accesat la 6 mai 2026.

³⁸ CSCE a fost concepută, dezvoltată și extinsă pentru a consolida securitatea și cooperarea în Europa între cele două blocuri politico-militare antagonice, lumea comunistă și cea a democrațiilor liberale. Actul Final de la Helsinki a fost semnat de 35 de state, inclusiv de către Uniunea Sovietică și SUA, la 1 august 1975, care s-au angajat să respecte și să implementeze 10 principii: 1. egalitatea suverană, respectarea drepturilor inerente suveranității; 2. abținerea de la utilizarea forței sau amenințarea cu forța; 3. inviolabilitatea frontierelor; 4. integritatea teritorială a statelor; 5. soluționarea pașnică a disputelor; 6. neamestecul în afacerile interne; 7. respectarea drepturilor omului și a libertăților fundamentale, inclusiv libertatea de gândire, conștiință, religie sau credință; 8. egalitatea în drepturi și autodeterminarea popoarelor; 9. cooperarea între state; 10. îndeplinirea cu bună-credință a obligațiilor care le revin în temeiul dreptului internațional (<https://www.csce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Helsinki-Final-Act.pdf>, accesat la 5 mai 2026).

³⁹ Thomas Vogel, *In troubled waters. The OSCE in times of war*, articol publicat pe 14 octombrie 2024, pe site-ul <https://epde.org>, accesat la 5 mai 2026.

⁴⁰ Diana Botău, Valentin Constantin, *Drept Internațional. Partea generală*, Editura Hamangiu, 2023, p. 260.

China's Approach to the Russia–Ukraine War: Geopolitics, Interests, and Perceptions

Șerban Filip CIOCULESCU, PhD

Abstract

This study examines the main characteristics of China–Ukraine political and economic relations in their historical development, taking into account the perceptions and interests of both countries' leadership, as well as the views of international relations and geopolitical experts.

China officially claims neutrality and emphasises its commitment to peace in accordance with international law. However, its discourse and behaviour reveal a strategic inclination towards Russia. Although China has not endorsed the Russian invasion, its 2023 peace plan was formally grounded in United Nations principles and its own legal doctrine.

This apparent duality highlights the tension between normative positioning and geopolitical pragmatism in China's foreign policy. While Beijing refrains from formally endorsing Russia's actions, its discursive and strategic choices indicate a prioritisation of systemic power considerations over the defence of Ukraine's sovereignty in practical terms. But Beijing is also concerned with preventing any nuclear escalation in this conflict and has constantly maintained its no-first-use stance regarding Russia's military activities.

At the same time, China's Russia-friendly rhetoric and strategic alignment with Moscow suggest that Beijing prioritises balancing against the United States and NATO over the practical defence of Ukraine's sovereignty. Nevertheless, the prolongation of the conflict in Europe does not serve China's economic interests, indicating that Beijing could adopt a more active role in promoting an effective peace settlement.

Keywords: *China, Ukraine, cooperation, peace plan, trade, technology, strategic hedging, diplomacy, war, neutrality*

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1. Assessing the Object of Study: The Historical Facts and the Theoretical Lens

This article aims to give an explanation of China's views and behaviour towards Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, while assessing Beijing's own economic and strategic interests in relation to Ukraine. It draws on primary sources, especially Chinese and Ukrainian official statements and strategic documents, but also on secondary sources,

including books and articles written by Chinese, Ukrainian, Russian, and Western political scientists and security studies experts. The research is based on several relevant questions and hypotheses.

Which were the Chinese perceptions on Russia's hostility towards Ukraine before the start of the 2022 war? How did official Chinese discourse frame Russia's actions towards Ukraine? Did Chinese strategic discourse conceptualise Ukraine as an independent actor or primarily as a geopolitical arena for the Russia versus West competition? To what extent did

China signal either deterrence, acquiescence, or strategic ambiguity towards Russia prior to the invasion? How does China reconcile its official commitment to sovereignty and territorial integrity with its de facto alignment with Russia? How does China interpret the Ukraine war in relation to Taiwan?

Our analysis is based on two hypotheses. The first is that China could not, or did not want to prevent Russia from attacking Ukraine and, after the aggression occurred, chose to tacitly side with Russia, even if officially it remained neutral and apparently committed to respecting UN rules. The second hypothesis is that Chinese officials perceived this war as a proxy conflict between Russia and the West and did not want Russia to lose, while likely being satisfied that Russia becomes economically and technologically more dependent on China. However, in our opinion, China is wary of the regional trade troubles and losses generated by this war, and would likely prefer to see it end soon.

We will use “hoop tests” and “smoking gun tests”, which are basic process-tracing methods in international relations (IR), useful to explain causal inference. Hoop tests are seen as necessary, preliminary checks that help to eliminate non-valid hypotheses. Those hypotheses which pass the test survive but require further testing. Smoking gun tests are the ones which provide sufficient evidence to strongly confirm a hypothesis or validate a causal mechanism.¹

Regarding the theoretical framework, the concept of “strategic hedging”² could be well-suited for our work, as it allows a better understanding of the fact that China does not openly support Russia against the West, nor try to balance against Russia by helping Ukraine and thus supporting the enforcement of international law. Beijing prefers to play an ambiguous strategy of subtly supporting Moscow while trying to keep positive relations with EU states. Perhaps it hopes that in the future the EU could become a partner or even an ally to balance against the USA. One cannot fully understand the pro-Russian preferences of Beijing without visualising the increasingly bipolar systemic competition between the USA and China, a bi-multipolar configuration in which China does not have any strong ally except for Russia, which in fact is a close stra-

tegic partner, not a declared ally. Beijing is the second strongest player within the world system (after the USA), trying to assert strategic control over its junior partner, Moscow, and support it in order to avoid a disaster (namely losing the war), while ensuring that China continues to benefit from Russian natural resources without interruption but also keep a satisfactory access to European and American markets. Indirectly supporting Russia against US interests (at least during the Biden Administration) can also be seen as a “soft balancing” strategy.³

Beijing seems anxious about having to choose sides, so it refrains from conceiving Ukraine as a USA’s partner to balance against, and at the same time it does not wish to openly support Russia against the EU (and the USA during the Biden Administration), preferring the strategic hedging option.⁴ Therefore, it cultivates a pro-Russian, ostensibly neutral stance, since Beijing provides Russia with diplomatic, economic and technological support.⁵ A study published by the European Council of Foreign Relations stated that “China has emerged as a key enabler of the war machine”.⁶ The People’s Republic of China (PRC) also seeks to position itself as a mediator in many conflicts around the world, just as the US President Donald Trump has also sought to do. However, the Chinese leadership thinks strategically, bearing in mind the evolving bipolar competition with Washington and the need to have reliable partners (allies) in order to eventually prevail in this competition. They speak and act in a goal-oriented pattern, always keeping in mind the national interest, which is to preserve good relations with Russia, Ukraine, the US and EU states. They calculate risks and benefits and act only when risks are low and gains are high.⁷

We must understand China’s position towards Ukraine, starting from the official doctrine assumed by Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership. The main concepts are as follows:

– **The community of shared destiny** - (命运共同体), which is a concept of cooperative security based on equality, mutual trust, reciprocity, and the need to create enhanced cooperation mechanisms.

– The **“Chinese Dream”** (Zhonghua Minzu - 中华民族)⁸ and the **“rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”** (中华民族伟大复兴)⁹ are the

main concepts focusing on the modernisation of the country and the increase of its military and economic power, so as to stand on an equal footing with the USA in 2049. These concepts symbolically express a national (collective) recovery from the so-called “century of humiliation” (百年耻辱), which began with China’s defeat in the Opium War (1840–1842) and ended with the establishment of the PRC in 1949.

– The “**new type of great power relationship**” (新兴大国关系) refers to a new bilateral relationship with the US marked by the equality of power and status. The USA rejected this concept, and Beijing did not extend it to other regional powers.

2. China and Ukraine: What Kind of Bilateral Relations?

The evolution of the China–Ukraine relations was based on pragmatism and avoidance of any ideological burden. The PRC recognised the new Ukrainian state on 27 December 1991, but established diplomatic relations with it only on 4 January 1992. Ukraine clearly affirmed the “One China policy”, as have all European states, and China recognised Ukraine as an independent state within its existing borders. The Chinese president visited Ukraine in June 2011, and a Joint Declaration on Establishment and Development of Strategic Partnership Relations between Ukraine and the PRC was signed.¹⁰ In December 2013, the president of Ukraine visited the PRC and the two leaders signed a treaty on friendship and cooperation, a joint declaration on further deepening of strategic partnership relations, and also a programme of development of strategic partnership relations between Ukraine and the PRC for the years 2014–2018. In 1994, when Ukraine signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, giving up its nuclear weapons and receiving security guarantees from the USA, the UK and Russia, China greeted the agreement and declared that it would never use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine. It also stated that in the event Ukraine were under threat of nuclear aggression, China would provide

“corresponding security assurances” consistent with its policies and the UN Charter. Of course, China was not seen as a guarantor itself, similar to the three other countries, but as a moral supporter of that important deal. Of course, after February 2022, Chinese officials never mentioned that episode to their Russian counterparts.

One must mention that the Treaty of Friendship from 2013 contained a key phrase: “none of the sides shall take any action that harms the sovereignty, security, or territorial integrity of the other side”.¹¹ In fact, China provided Ukraine with assurances regarding sovereignty and territorial integrity, but in exchange for security guarantees regarding Ukraine maintaining its non-nuclear status.

Unfortunately, Beijing did not respect this commitment in a consistent way. China actively tried to benefit from Ukrainian technology and resources. It benefited from Ukrainian military assets inherited from the USSR; as an example, the unfinished aircraft carrier Varyag was purchased from Ukraine in 1998 (under the pretext that it would be used as a floating casino boat) and later transformed into China’s first aircraft carrier, renamed Liaoning. Kyiv also supplied jet engines to Beijing – a very important technology that Russia was initially reluctant to share with China. It sold to the Chinese the pre-production version of Russian-made SU-33, which the Chinese incorporated into the development of their own J-15 carrier-based fighter. Also, in 2009, a contract was concluded for four Zubr-class hovercrafts to be bought by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).¹²

After Xi Jinping became general secretary of the CCP and later president of the republic (2013), he launched the vast multi-continental geo-economic project *The Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), in March 2013, and Ukraine was included in it. China became one of the main trading partners for Ukraine, while the European country became a major agricultural exporter to China. Ukraine was one of the main providers of food and mineral resources for China up to 2022: sunflower oil, barley, and also iron ore and titanium. However, Ukraine was never invited to be a formal member of the China–CEE (17+1, later 15+1) format. The initiative, which was launched by Beijing in 2012,

primarily included European Union members from Central and Eastern Europe and most of the Western Balkan nations.

When Russia forcefully and illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, Xi maintained a strategic ambiguity: it never recognised that territory as belonging to Russia, but totally abstained from any condemnation of Moscow's behaviour. The fully fledged Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which started in February 2022, was preceded by a meeting between Xi and Putin, where they declared a "no-limits partnership". Each time that the UN General Assembly voted to condemn Russian aggression and asked for immediate peace (2 March 2022, 24 March 2022, 12 October 2022, and 23 February 2023)¹³, Beijing was among the states that abstained. Its representative within the UN constantly asked for a diplomatic resolution to the conflict and the renunciation of violence. Official Chinese statements available online mention that even before Russia started its aggressive war in 2022, Beijing stayed firm in support of Ukraine's right to independence and territorial integrity. China claims to be neutral in the conflict and has not joined Western sanctions against Russia. However, China has gradually turned into a war enabler for Russia, through its trade and technologic transfers.

Therefore, there is no wonder that in the last ten years, economic and trade relations between Kyiv and Beijing have deteriorated, and it is known that the EU states and the USA asked Ukraine not to sell some strategic companies to Chinese firms. A good example is the case of Beijing-based Skyrizon Aviation which, in 2016, sought to acquire a controlling stake in Ukraine's Motor Sich company – well-known as one of the world's top makers of engines for cargo aircraft and helicopters. Eventually, the USA convinced Ukraine not to sell this company, and later Skyrizon Aviation sued Ukraine for \$4.5 billion.¹⁴

Trade between Russia and China has increased in a spectacular way¹⁵, but on the other side, the PRC was also interested in economic exchange with Ukraine. In 2017, China became Ukraine's largest trading partner. Bilateral trade was worth nearly \$235 billion in 2025. The trade between China and Ukraine is only about an aggregate \$21 billion – with China

exporting roughly \$19.2 billion worth of goods to Ukraine, and Ukraine exporting around \$1.8 billion to China.¹⁶ In 2024, the Ukraine–China trade value was about \$16.8 billion, but there is a huge imbalance favouring China.¹⁷ About 21% of Ukrainian imports came from China. The trade balance is heavily in China's favour, reflecting Ukraine's dependency on manufactured and consumer goods from China¹⁸ versus China's smaller imports from Ukraine.

Therefore, Ukraine was initially seen in Beijing as a valuable economic partner and a country that could potentially belong to a Chinese circle of friendly states, supporting the PRC's rising power.

But now, in the political and economic realms, Ukraine firmly stands with the EU states as a candidate for future membership; the Chinese know that when post-war reconstruction begins, European and American companies are likely to take most of the profitable contracts, while China will get only some remains, being seen as a Russia's partner.

3. Assessing Chinese and Ukrainian Expert Perceptions of the Russia–Ukraine War

We know the official position of China towards the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the pro-Russian ambiguity which has damaged the international image of the PRC, at least in the eyes of Western states.¹⁹ But what do Chinese academics think? Collective memory, ideological influences, and geopolitical calculations shape Chinese perceptions of this war.

Da Wei, a professor in the Department of International Relations at Tsinghua University, stated that "there is no consensus among either Chinese scholars or the general public on how to understand the war – and therefore on how to respond". He also emphasised that there are two main visions among the Chinese: one which sees Russia as an aggressor and empathises with the victim, Ukraine, and the opposite one, which sees Russia as defending a legitimate claim to control its sphere of influence and blocking Western expansion. The

latter group empathises with Russia “because they see China, too, as a target of Western encirclement and containment”²⁰

In a seminal article written by Alicja Bachulska and Mark Leonard from the European Council on Foreign Relations, regarding the Chinese debate about the Russia–Ukraine war²¹, the opinions of some important Chinese experts and researchers were used to extract a number of key assumptions.

First, Chinese experts often think the USA is using the war in Ukraine to encircle Russia and China, and that the European NATO states contribute to that strategy. Shen Shishun, an expert from China Institute of International Studies, complains about the squeezing of Russian strategic space. America is seen as the main economic beneficiary of the war, as it sells more gas and oil to Europe. Some academics also suspect that “Washington is using the crisis to build more connections between its allies in the Indo-Pacific and the Euro-Atlantic region.”²² Wang Yiwei, from Renmin University and a staunch adept of the BRI, stated that Western states interfered in Russia’s sphere of security interests and that the war was a consequence of that.²³

They recognised that Russia made a mistake by attacking Ukraine, but in fact it was a proxy-war against the West’s attempt to interfere in its sphere of interest and change its regime. But Russia was unable to secure a quick victory and had to rely on Chinese economic and technological support. So, China must support Russia in order to prevent a US victory, because Ukraine is an important state-actor used by the West for its proxy war against Moscow. China and Russia have a shared goal to reshape the global order according to multipolarity and their autocratic regimes’ features. “By and large, intellectuals agree that China and Russia need to stand together in a joint effort to weaken the US-led international order, a system that both regimes believe presents an existential threat.”²⁴

Some Chinese experts adopted the Russian vocabulary by calling the war a “special military operation”. These people see Ukraine as legitimately belonging to Russia’s sphere of influence, and they think Putin has a rational reason to fight back when NATO attempted to

enter that area.²⁵ Some of them – an example being Yang Xuguang, a senior adviser with the Chinese Institute for International Strategic Studies – think that the West used the pretext of this war to try to change the government (the regime) in Russia, and even to provoke “a second disintegration of the country, eradicating Russia from the world once for all”²⁶

It is possible that within the state apparatus of China some “hawks” (from the so-called “wolf warrior” camp) are overly revisionist and accept changes in the international law. In April 2023, the Chinese ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, said during a television interview that former Soviet countries don’t have an “effective status in international law”, a statement which generated diplomatic consternation, especially in Poland and the Baltic states.²⁷ But there are also critical voices among experts, who recognise Russia’s mistake to start an unjustified aggression because of a victim mentality, and argue that Russian irrationality could become “a liability” for China in the future.²⁸ Feng Yujun, of the Fudan University, is one of those critics of Russian behaviour. Other Chinese experts speaking under anonymity, complained about Russian hybrid warfare by manipulating state-affiliated Chinese media and “duping Chinese leaders” into giving more support to Russia than is normal.²⁹

Generally speaking, official Chinese political scientists and historians consider Ukraine’s fate to have been strongly determined by the “coloured revolutions”, which they view as having been instigated by the United States, including through the use of the CIA during the anti-Yanukovich street upheavals from November 2013 to February 2014. Chen Jian, a prominent historian³⁰ who clearly distinguishes between Western-style democracy and Chinese democracy (which, in his opinion, “is internally generated, not imposed by external forces”), mentions Ukraine as a victim of these coloured revolutions and asserts that the CIA “initiated a youth movement organisation called ‘Pora’ in Ukraine,” which was very active during the Maidan protests in Kyiv.³¹ Such opinions, which suggest that Ukrainians did not build democracy themselves but instead adopted foreign models, implicitly tend to justify Russian aggression, even if they do not do so explicitly.

Dimension	View on the War in Ukraine	View on Russia	View on Ukraine	View on the West (USA/NATO)
Nature of the conflict	Seen as a complex geopolitical conflict; often framed as a result of security dilemmas rather than clear-cut aggression	Not officially labelled as an aggressor; actions sometimes framed as strategic or defensive	Viewed as a victim of war, but also as part of a broader geopolitical struggle	Seen as a key contributor to tensions through NATO expansion
Responsibility for the war	Avoids explicitly assigning blame; emphasis on “multiple causes”	Partial justification via “legitimate security concerns”	Not blamed directly, but sometimes portrayed as influenced by external actors	Frequently seen as provoking or escalating the conflict, in order to weaken Russia
Territorial integrity	Officially supports sovereignty and territorial integrity in principle.	Does not recognise annexations, but avoids condemning them.	Officially supports Ukraine's territorial integrity.	Accused of applying “double standards” in international law.
Use of force	Formally opposes military aggression and promotes peaceful resolution.	Avoids direct criticism of Russian military actions.	Calls for cessation of hostilities affecting Ukraine.	Criticises Western military aid as prolonging the war.
Preferred solution	Ceasefire and negotiations; political settlement	Supports diplomatic outcomes favourable to stability (and Russia).	Encourages negotiations rather than military victory.	Urges the West to support negotiations instead of military escalation.
Geopolitical interpretation	War seen within US–China systemic rivalry and global power shifts.	Considered a strategic partner and counterweight to the US	Seen as a secondary actor in a great-power competition	Viewed as pursuing containment of both Russia and China
Narratives accepted	Some openness to Russian narratives (civil war within Ukraine, Ukrainians as a pseudo-nation etc.)	Russian justifications often tolerated or indirectly echoed.	Ukrainian narrative less emphasised	Western narratives often questioned or rejected
China's role	Positions itself as neutral mediator and peace promoter.	Maintains strategic partnership (“no-limits partner”).	Maintains formal neutrality.	Seeks to counter-balance Western influence globally.
Strategic implications	War seen as testing the global order and Western resolve	A weakened but dependent Russia is advantageous for China.	Ukraine seen as a battleground rather than a strategic partner	Conflict seen as distracting the West from Asia (especially Taiwan)

What about the opinions of Ukrainian political experts? They generally perceive China as being close to Russia in geopolitical terms and as using the war in Europe as a means to weaken the West as a whole. They tend to believe that Chinese decision-makers view the war through the lens of China's aim to reunify with Taiwan, potentially including the use of force. If Russia manages to achieve its goals in Ukraine, China could be encouraged to

act more boldly and even use force to change borders. China's main interest is that Russia should not be defeated and that no regime change should occur. Some examples may be useful.³²

Petro Shevchenko, a sinologist at Jilin University (Changchun, China) thinks that China prefers a freeze of the conflict rather than a real peace settlement. It does not necessarily want a formal peace agreement. China could try to influence Ukraine through economic incentives, such as helping with post-war reconstruction and offering better access to the Chinese market for Ukrainian agricultural exports. If Ukraine rejects China's proposals (as it did by slowing down participation in the Belt and Road programme after 2014), China might start openly supplying Russia with weapons (e.g., drones or microchips), just as Iran did. Therefore, China is acting strategically and pragmatically, using diplomacy and economic leverage rather than openly siding with Russia. Since China maintains an important strategic relationship with Russia, Beijing has been cautious not to deepen cooperation with Ukraine in ways that could harm its connections with Moscow. Also, Ukraine and Hungary have poor relations; their leaders (President Zelensky and Prime Minister Orbán) are hostile to each other, therefore, the likelihood of new terrestrial and energy infrastructure linking the two states is small in the near future.

Ukrainian politicians generally avoid accusing China of being a silent supporter of Russia. Volodymyr Ohryzko, former foreign minister of Ukraine, stated that China is unlikely to openly provide military support to Russia. If Beijing crosses the red line and openly supports Russia militarily, it would face serious economic and political consequences internationally. Therefore, China will be cautious because it wants to avoid a global backlash.³³

The political analyst Igar Tyshkevich perceives the war as part of a broader geopolitical transformation, where the major powers – the USA and China – may benefit strategically from the disruption and the reshaping of the global order. China sees an advantage in the fact that the West is deeply invested in the war and is therefore less able to take part in counterbalancing the PRC.³⁴

Maksym Beznosiuk, director of the NGO UAinFocus, stated that “increasingly, Russia and China also cooperate in disinformation operations: Chinese campaigns, such as ‘Spamouflage’ are amplified by Russian media outlets and diplomatic channels. Both countries employ what look to be synchronised narratives accusing the West of being responsible for the war in Ukraine.”³⁵

Temur Umarov, a sinologist and expert at Carnegie Politika (Berlin), argues that the war strengthens China's geopolitical position. Why? Because Western sanctions isolate Russia and push it closer to China economically and politically, therefore Russia increasingly depends on China because it has fewer international partners. At the same time, the United States of America is heavily focused on Ukraine, which reduces its ability to confront China elsewhere.³⁶

4. China's Position on Inter-State Aggression and Its Stance on Russia's War Against Ukraine

In the specialised literature on contemporary armed conflicts, China represents an interesting case study. Officially, it consistently claims to support the UN peace system and multilateralism, to oppose military aggression, and to promote peaceful global cooperation. However, when examining the history of the Russia–Ukraine war, China's behaviour raises a number of well-founded suspicions. If China does not recognise Russia's right to claim new territories taken from Ukraine, and if such territorial seizures contradict the letter and spirit of the UN Charter, why has Beijing not clearly and publicly expressed its opposition?

Tacit acceptance of aggression by one state against another is not typical of the PRC, a country that officially presents itself as strongly committed to respecting the rules of the UN Charter. Much depends, however, on the relationship it has established with the aggressor and on the broader geopolitical context. Beijing appears to be more of a pragmatic actor than one strictly committed to norms. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979,

China was very vocal in its protest and, in fact, aligned itself with the Western camp against the USSR. The *People's Daily*, the main newspaper of the CCP, stated at the time: "Escalation of the Afghanistan intervention will only result in the spread of the flames of armed rebellion into a conflagration, and Moscow will get its fingers burned".³⁷ The Chinese leadership perceived this action as part of a strategy of encirclement and, according to historical sources, even supported the Afghan mujahideen with weapons, as the United States and Pakistan did. This stance was also influenced by the fact that, a few years earlier, China and the United States had begun a process of rapprochement, initiating broader political, economic and security cooperation that contributed to the isolation of the USSR on the global stage. In this context, the Soviet Union was seen as China's main security threat, and Afghanistan's territory was perceived as a potential platform for a Soviet attack.

By contrast, in 2022 the geopolitical context changed radically, and Moscow became a "no-limits partner" for Beijing. The two states signed a strategic partnership agreement on 4 February of that year, shortly before the invasion of Ukraine. At that time, it was the United States and its allies that were perceived as attempting to encircle China, while Russia was viewed as the only major power willing to support Beijing against this strategy. The current strategic environment is primarily characterised by systemic competition between the United States and China within an increasingly multipolar world, in which Russia represents a useful partner for Beijing. A potential Russian defeat could lead to regime change, a coup d'état, or even territorial disintegration – developments that would be highly unfavourable for China.

A further question is whether Beijing was aware of Russia's plans to attack Ukraine or whether it was not informed at all. It is impossible to determine with certainty whether Chinese leader Xi Jinping knew about Vladimir Putin's decision to launch the invasion on 24 February 2022. There is no clear evidence that Putin informed him or sought his approval.³⁸ What can be observed, however, is that in the cases of Russian aggression against

Georgia and later Ukraine, China has never condemned Moscow and has consistently avoided adopting a clear and explicit stance. Instead, it has limited itself to not recognising territorial changes imposed by force –, such as the independence claims of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the annexation of Crimea, and later that of other Ukrainian regions – while calling for conflicts to be resolved through diplomatic negotiations. At the same time, Beijing has appeared receptive to Moscow's narrative that its interventions were aimed at ending civil conflicts and protecting ethnic Russians, allegedly threatened by "genocide" in Ukraine, as well as Abkhazians and Ossetians who were portrayed as being harassed by the governments in Kyiv and Tbilisi. In turn, Moscow has refrained from criticising China over sensitive issues, such as the treatment of the Uyghurs and has expressed full support for Beijing's objective of regaining control over Taiwan.

Regarding the war in Ukraine, Xi Jinping and other Chinese officials have repeatedly declared their support for peace negotiations and for the renunciation of military violence by all involved actors. The principles of sovereignty and respect for international law are presented as cornerstones of Chinese foreign policy. Also, Beijing diplomatically conveyed to Russia the message not to escalate rhetoric regarding the possible use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, as China has kept its no-first-use doctrine.³⁹

In August 2022, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in an interview with the *South China Morning Post* that China should maintain its neutrality and avoid siding with Russia. He also called for a direct conversation with Xi Jinping as soon as possible: "China has chosen a policy of staying away. At the moment, Ukraine is satisfied with this policy. It is better than assisting the Russian Federation in any way. I would like to believe that China will not pursue a different policy." He added that he hoped China would reconsider its position towards Russia and suggested that Beijing should play a more active role within the UN Security Council as a permanent member.⁴⁰

In an effort to present itself as a contributor to global peace, Beijing produced a

12-point peace plan. However, this plan did not include any demand for the withdrawal of Russian troops from occupied Ukrainian territories, nor did it suggest that China was willing to assume broader global responsibilities as a peace broker beyond its own national interests.⁴¹ A statement issued on 24 February 2023, by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs – symbolically marking one year since the start of the invasion – outlined this peace proposal, focusing on sovereignty, security, de-escalation, and global stability.⁴²

The plan called for strict respect for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all countries under the UN Charter, while rejecting double standards in international law. It urged the abandonment of a “Cold War mentality”, opposed the expansion of military alliances, and promoted the development of a balanced and sustainable European security architecture that would take into account the security concerns of all states. It emphasised the need for an immediate ceasefire, restraint from all parties, and the resumption of direct peace talks as the only viable solution, while also expressing China’s willingness to play a constructive role.

Humanitarian concerns were also addressed, including the protection of civilians, the establishment of humanitarian corridors, the safeguarding of prisoners of war, and support for UN-coordinated aid efforts. The plan further stressed the importance of protecting nuclear facilities, preventing nuclear escalation, and opposing the use of chemical and biological weapons. From an economic perspective, it supported the continuation of grain exports under the Black Sea Initiative, opposed unilateral sanctions not authorised by the UN Security Council, and called for maintaining stable global supply chains in order to limit damage to the global economy.

Finally, the proposal expressed support for post-conflict reconstruction and affirmed China’s readiness to contribute. Overall, the document presented a framework advocating ceasefire, negotiations, opposition to sanctions and bloc politics, protection of civilians, and long-term reconstruction, while portraying China as a constructive and neutral global actor.

However, the document made no reference to the need for Russia to withdraw its military forces from Ukrainian territory. The absence of any explicit identification of the aggressor allows official Chinese discourse to avoid addressing the origins of the conflict and assigning responsibility. Simply invoking a “Cold War mentality” is insufficient to provide an accurate understanding of this war.

One may argue that Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin were aware that Russia’s aggression and territorial annexations could open a global “Pandora’s box”, potentially encouraging other states to revise borders by force. Although China officially rejects territorial changes achieved through military means, it continues to aspire to incorporate Taiwan and other disputed territories. Some strategic analysts have suggested that in 2022 and 2023, when Russian forces were pushed back by Ukrainian counter-offensives, Putin may have considered the use of a tactical nuclear weapon to stabilise the front.⁴³ According to this interpretation, pressure from China – and possibly India – may have discouraged such a move, although there is no concrete evidence to support this claim.

A related issue concerns China’s own historical territorial disputes with Russia. In the 19th century, a weakened Chinese Empire lost vast territories to the Russian Empire.⁴⁴ Today, however, President Xi appears largely indifferent to the parallels with Ukraine’s situation. Unlike its firm stance on Taiwan or its territorial disputes with Japan, China under Xi Jinping does not emphasise these historical grievances in its relations with Russia. Border disputes between the two countries were formally settled in the 1990s and 2000s, and Beijing now treats the matter as closed. Strategic partnership with Moscow clearly takes precedence over historical resentment.

In some official statements, China frequently called for recognition of Russia’s “legitimate security concerns”, suggesting that it views the war as a reaction to NATO expansion in the post-Soviet space and tends to portray Ukraine as a geopolitical instrument of the West.⁴⁵

It is therefore unsurprising that public opinion in Ukraine is largely unfavourable

towards China and its leadership. A survey conducted in November 2025 as part of Gallup International's End of Year Survey indicated that 80% of respondents held a negative view of the Chinese president, with 40% expressing very negative opinions and another 40% somewhat negative ones. Only 10% reported a positive perception, while the remaining 10% were undecided.⁴⁶

Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin are both authoritarian leaders who preside over personalist regimes with ideologies that are largely hostile to Western liberalism. As a result, they have developed a sense of solidarity and a pattern of mutual support against common adversaries. The need for a strong partner in opposition to the United States and its allies has clearly taken precedence over strict adherence to international law. Xi is aware that the relationship is asymmetrical, with Russia increasingly dependent on China economically and politically. As international sanctions weaken Russia, its reliance on access to Chinese markets and technology continues to grow. China has also become a major purchaser of Russian energy resources, replacing, to a large extent, European demand.

Moreover, China faces a relative shortage of reliable allies and therefore cannot easily distance itself from Russia, which functions as a quasi-ally. The more military support Western countries provide to Ukraine – and to other partners, such as Israel – the more strained their resources become, potentially reducing their capacity to respond to a crisis in the Taiwan Strait. From Beijing's perspective, this strategic diversion is advantageous.

As researcher Evelyn Yeh has argued the interaction between Russia and China contributes to prolonging the war in Ukraine and testing the Western response, while simultaneously influencing strategic calculations regarding Taiwan.⁴⁷ This dynamic contributes to a growing interconnection between European and Indo-Pacific security, with broader implications for global stability. In the context of escalating tensions in the Middle East as of 2026, one may argue that the European, Middle Eastern, and Asia-Pacific theatres are increasingly interconnected, reinforcing the perception of a globalised security environment. This perception was reinforced by Ukraine's decision to

give valuable anti-drone support to Arab Gulf states attacked by Iran.

5. Attributing the Main Guilt to the West: The Xi–Putin Consensus

Whenever the Chinese and Russian presidents have met, they have preferred to blame the United States and the West in general for triggering the conflict in Ukraine. China has avoided labelling Russia as the aggressor or calling for the withdrawal of its forces from Ukraine and Georgia. Xi delayed for one year and two months a direct conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, although the latter had requested a face-to-face discussion and Chinese participation in peace negotiations as early as 2022. Xi finally called Zelensky on 26 April 2023, and proposed sending a special representative to Kyiv to facilitate peace. However, it was only on 23–25 July 2024 that Ukraine's foreign minister visited Beijing for talks with his counterpart, Wang Yi – the first visit by a Ukrainian minister of foreign affairs to China since 2016.

Subsequently, Switzerland organised a major peace conference on 15–16 June 2024. China refused to participate, in solidarity with Russia, which had not been invited. The implicit message sent by the Chinese leadership was that Beijing and Moscow, with the support of Global South countries, have their own peace solution – one that can be read as favourable to Moscow. Rejecting a negotiated solution within a multilateral framework (92 states and several intergovernmental organisations sent representatives to Switzerland) further damaged China's external image.

When Wang Yi visited several EU states between 1 and 6 July 2025, holding talks with European officials, such as Kaja Kallas and António Costa, reports emerged in Brussels that he had asked the EU not to contribute to Russia's defeat in Ukraine, as this would not be in Beijing's national interest since it would strengthen US power. Although he stated that China does not provide military support to Russia, information soon surfaced that Ukrainians had discovered a Chinese component in a Shahed 136 drone that had struck Kyiv.

Ukraine's political leadership is, therefore, aware that the PRC is the main economic and technological supporter of its major existential adversary, yet it usually avoids openly and aggressively criticising China. The two countries, in fact, have a strategic partnership. An exception was the summoning of the Chinese ambassador in Kyiv to the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry on 22 April 2025, to lodge a complaint regarding Chinese citizens fighting on Russia's side – some of whom had been captured and shown on news broadcasts. For the first time, Zelensky informed the Chinese side that Ukraine learned that China had supplied weapons and gunpowder to Russia, something the ambassador vehemently denied. Even more, the Ukrainian president stated during the press conference that his government had received intelligence that China was producing weapons on Russian territory.⁴⁸

De facto solidarity with Russia and harsh criticism of the West suggest that China and Russia – who describe themselves as strategic partners and boast of a “no-limits partnership” (distinct from a traditional alliance) – are actively coordinating to prepare joint resistance against what they call American hegemony and the West's desire to dominate the world ideologically and economically. It is, therefore, clear that international law has taken a back seat, with Xi far more concerned about the global balance of power and multifaceted confrontation with the West and its allies. Xi and Putin are also focused on attracting as many Global South states as possible to their side, knowing that many of them view Western economic dominance and liberal values with scepticism.

China's proclaimed neutrality towards the Russian–Ukrainian conflict and its self-assumed role as peacemaker are unconvincing, at least in NATO and EU countries. It is true that US accusations against China – that it is transferring dual-use technology to Russia and even supplying certain weapons covertly – are difficult to prove. However, it cannot be denied that Russian–Chinese economic and technological exchanges are extremely important for Russia in order to withstand successive waves of sanctions and to continue the war against Ukraine with relative success.

As for the much-discussed Chinese peace plan, it is merely a propaganda tool of the regime in Beijing and an attempt to convince the international community that the PRC is an active defender of international law principles.

In reality, it has become clear that the PRC would not benefit from a rapid collapse of Russia, especially if this were to generate a geostrategic advance for the West and the disappearance of a fellow autocratic regime – one on which Xi Jinping could rely in the future should he decide to unify with Taiwan by force or to occupy all the contested islands in the South China Sea.

It is true that, compared to other major powers past or present, China has resorted less frequently to military force to achieve its national objectives (especially territorial expansion), and its trajectory thus differs significantly from that of Russia, Japan, or the United States, for example. Since 1979, the year of its brief but unusual clash with Vietnam (itself a communist state), China has not conducted a military campaign against another country. The frequent incidents along its mountainous border with India cannot, of course, be considered wars, even if they have resulted in deaths and injuries.

6. China Can Be Neither a Real Neutral Player, Nor an Honest Broker

China's desire to support Russia and keep it engaged in a proxy war against the West – with Ukraine perceived as a NATO pawn – means that Beijing cannot truly act as an honest broker in international efforts to achieve a durable peace in Europe. China intends to benefit from Western weakness and is ready to instrumentalise Russia's endurance on the battlefield in Ukraine, so as to be ready to shape the new multipolar world order. Xi Jinping famously stated in 2022, when meeting Russia's Putin, that “great changes unseen in a century” will come.⁴⁹

If Western countries allow Kyiv to use long-range missiles and drones to strike targets deep inside Russian territory from the

bridgehead it has already seized, Beijing will uneasily reflect on the possibility that Taiwan could be equipped by the United States and other countries with new, powerful modern weapons capable of hitting key targets inside Chinese territory.

As Chinese political elites perceive an intensifying confrontation with the United States and the West more broadly, they are gradually moving away from genuinely upholding principles, such as the non-use of force in international relations and condemning aggressors.⁵⁰ They rightly anticipate a long-term struggle with the United States and its allies over hegemony and fear encirclement and isolation. For this reason, they are unwilling to abandon Russia – a source of raw materials, advanced weapons, and political and military support. By accusing the United States of being the principal imperialist aggressor worldwide, China also capitalises on its appeal in the Global South and may gradually relax its strict adherence to the principles of the UN Charter, anticipating a prolonged period of conflict and in line with a widely held perception in China and the Global South that American power is in decline.

Officially, China maintains a position of neutrality. It does not recognise Russia's annexations in Ukraine, and it formally supports territorial integrity in principle.

However, in diplomatic statements and official narratives, Beijing frequently refers to Russia's "legitimate security concerns" and criticises NATO enlargement. Chinese officials often frame the war as the result of Cold War thinking and bloc expansion rather than explicitly calling it Russian aggression. Generally, China refrains from criticising states with which it has close political ties.⁵¹

Most security experts assess the likelihood of China having a valuable contribution to peace-process in Ukraine as low: "In short, China and Russia share almost complete ideological, political, diplomatic, and even economic alignment. Consequently, the limited scope of Sino-Ukrainian relations cannot in any way 'compete' with the breadth and depth of Sino-Russian relations. The former are therefore unlikely to influence Russia's positions in its war against Ukraine, let alone to lead China to

dissociate itself from Russia. As Ukrainian analyst Vita Golod so aptly writes: 'Watching the recent military parade in Beijing, where Xi Jinping stood alongside Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un, it is evident that China is unlikely to exert direct pressure on Russia or embrace Ukraine's definition of peace'⁵².

Of course, the official documents of China express a fully pro-peace position. The *Global Security Initiative*, one of the pillars of Xi's Chinese foreign and security policy, mentioned Ukraine only once: "Promote political settlement of international and regional hotspot issues. Encourage the countries concerned to overcome differences and resolve hotspots through candid dialogue and communication. Support the international community in constructively participating in the political settlement of hotspots, under the premise of non-interference in internal affairs, mainly through the means of facilitating peace talks, with fairness and practicality as the main attitude, and mainly following the approach of addressing both symptoms and root causes. Support political settlement of hotspot issues, such as the Ukraine crisis through dialogue and negotiation".⁵³

China's National Security in the New Era (2025) introduced the rejection of the use of nuclear weapons and mentioned the risk related to this scenario: "On the Ukrainian issue, China has adhered to objectivity and fairness, actively promoted peace talks, put forward the 'four principles', 'four commons', and 'three points of thinking', issued the 'China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukrainian Crisis', jointly issued the 'Six-Point Consensus' with Brazil, and launched the 'Friends of Peace' group with the 'Global South' countries, firmly safeguarding the consensus that 'nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought', and actively promoted the implementation of the 'Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Race', playing an important role in preventing the Ukrainian crisis from escalating into a nuclear conflict. China supports all efforts dedicated to peace, and believes that all parties and stakeholders should participate in the peace talks process in a timely manner".⁵⁴ The main idea of this document is

that wars must be avoided, as there will be no winners, and civilians must be protected in the war areas.

Ukrainian officials generally refrain from accusing China of supporting Russia, but in some instances they have done so, as in September 2024, when President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia was using Chinese satellites to photograph his country's nuclear energy facilities.⁵⁵ Also, when Ukrainians discovered Chinese components on Russian fallen drones, when capturing Chinese mercenaries in Donbas or as in April 2025, when they said that China had sent artillery and gunpowder to Russia and decided to sanction some Chinese companies. The EU included these Chinese firms in the 17th package of sanctions for supplying dual-use goods to Russia's war machine. On the other side, Ukraine did not openly reject participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, but the long war, geopolitical hedging by China, huge investment risks, EU alignment of Ukraine, and security concerns prevented large BRI projects from developing in this country.

Generally speaking, Ukraine tried to intensify its economic relations with the PRC after 2014, hoping that Chinese investments on its territory would deter Russia from attacking; then, in 2022–2023, it hoped that China could push Russia towards a negotiated peace.⁵⁶ These hopes were dashed by Beijing's tacit economic and diplomatic support for Russian Federation. Now that Ukraine is on its way to EU membership, we think that future Ukraine–China relations will be mostly guided by the EU's strategic and economic approach to China and Russia.

7. Consequences for the European Security

Of course, the fact that China did not openly support Russian aggression against Ukraine – unlike North Korea, Iran, etc. – can be seen as a positive element for European security. However, China's tacit support for Russia through expanded trade relations, investments, and transfers of dual-use technologies

is widely regarded as a negative development. Such support strengthens Russia's economic resilience and enables it to sustain significant military losses while continuing the war.

Most EU Member States have become increasingly aware of China's dual character: on the one hand, a valuable trade and technology partner; on the other, a de facto strategic partner of the primary actor threatening European security, the Russian Federation.

As the United States, particularly under Donald Trump, has shown signs of reduced commitment to European security (including Ukraine's protection) and has encouraged Europeans to assume greater responsibility for their own defence, EU Member States have come to understand that they must enhance their deterrence capabilities vis-à-vis Russia, especially along the EU/NATO eastern border. Since China is acting to increase Russian material power, China has to be seen as a risk and nuisance for European security.

Moreover, given Trump's scepticism towards a closer NATO cooperation with Asia-Pacific global partners –, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand – European states' decision-makers often recognise that if they wish to strengthen ties with these countries, they may need to do so through alternative institutional frameworks.

Europeans must also be aware that both China and Russia seek to exploit the growing geopolitical divide between themselves and the United States, perceiving the West as being fragmented. However, the idea of the EU supporting China against the United States in a risky balancing strategy is not attractive to most European states. Chinese and European strategic interests do not fundamentally converge (China is seen as a valuable partner of Russia), and their values and norms differ significantly. Romania is a good example of an EU country which gradually reduced its level of economic and political cooperation with China in the last six years, for security reasons.⁵⁷

The EU cannot realistically align itself with an authoritarian one-party state that supports Russia as long as EU–Russia relations remain confrontational. At the same time, China has expressed support for Ukraine's potential EU

membership (though not NATO membership) and officially endorses the idea of a strong and united Europe. However, this is not an element to quickly contribute to the normalisation of EU–PRC relations.

Conclusions

Process-tracing tests were useful to demonstrate the two hypotheses. As mentioned above, we used three “hoop tests” and three “smoking gun tests” to assess their validity.

The Hoop Test 1 (H1) was necessary to demonstrate that China did not publicly oppose or try to deter Russia before the invasion. The evidence to look for: the absence of explicit warnings to Russia in official Chinese statements (late 2021 – February 2022) and no visible diplomatic pressure on Moscow. If China had clearly warned Russia *not* to invade, then H1 would have failed.

The Hoop Test 2 (H2) - China maintained diplomatic and economic engagement with Russia after the invasion. Evidence is easy to find: the continuation of high-level bilateral meetings, repeated mentions of the no-limits partnership, no sanctions and trade continuity – or even an increase. If China had distanced itself significantly, then H2 would have failed.

The Hoop Test 3 (H3) - Chinese discourse avoids labelling Russia’s actions as “invasion”. The evidence is obvious: the use of terms like “Ukraine crisis” or “special military operation” instead of “war” or “invasion”. If China were to explicitly condemn Russia, then H3 would have failed.

The Smoking Gun 1 Test (SG1) is based on the evidence of prior knowledge or coordination. Examples: intelligence leaks suggesting China knew about invasion plans and the diplomatic signals that were produced (e.g., the timing around the Olympics). If found, this strongly supports the hypothesis that China “could not or did not want to prevent” the conflict.

The Smoking Gun 2 Test (SG2) is based on the Chinese explicit or implicit support for Russia post-invasion. The evidence is clear: blaming NATO’s expansion for the war and echoing Russian narratives in official discourse. This is especially strong because it shows alignment beyond neutrality.

The Smoking Gun 3 Test (SG3) relies on the economic behaviour that cushions Russia. The evidence: increased energy imports and financial mechanisms bypassing sanctions. All these actions are hard to reconcile with genuine neutrality.

Therefore, our hypotheses were confirmed.

Taking into account the existing Chinese official statements and strategic documents, but also the Chinese behaviour on the international arena, all the evidence strongly suggests that:

- China views the conflict largely through a geopolitical lens and considers that Russia has a legitimate goal to defend its sphere of influence against the West. The Russia–Ukraine war is seen by Xi Jinping and the other Chinese officials, as well as by many security experts, mostly as a proxy war of the West against Russia. As I explained in a previous article, sometimes “Beijing also adopted Moscow’s fabricated theories of conspiracy, such as that of a pretended US biological warfare research in Ukraine, and rejected the existence of Russian war crimes in Ukraine”⁵⁸

- China proposed a neutral peace plan for Ukraine and Russia, but it avoided any scenario in which it would assume the role of a regional or global policeman, playing a major and active role in the peacemaking process.

- China claims neutrality and assesses a clear preference for peace, but its discourse and behaviour lean strategically towards Russia. It considers NATO expansion to the East as the central cause of the war. Its narrative aligns more closely with Moscow’s security narrative than with Kyiv’s sovereignty-based framing. But the nuclear taboo remains an essential element of Chinese security policy; thus, Beijing is concerned about Moscow’s likelihood of using nuclear coercion in the war in Ukraine.

- Xi Jinping and his political fellows have always avoided labelling Russia as the aggressor and never asked Moscow to withdraw

forces from Ukraine. Beijing and Moscow see the idea of spheres of interest as a positive one, and China may tacitly accept a certain degree of territorial revisionism. It implicitly portrays Ukraine as a fragile state caught in a broader strategic confrontation between Russia and the West.

– That does not mean China officially endorses the invasion. On the contrary, its peace plan (2023) was based on UN principles and domestic juridical doctrine. But its Russia-friendly rhetoric and strategic alignment with Moscow indicate that Beijing prioritises the strategy of balancing against the United States and NATO over defending Ukraine's sovereignty in practical terms.

– There are some critical voices among strategic experts in China who blame Russia for its aggressiveness and irrational behaviour, but these voices are marginal.

Notes

¹ See David Collier, *The Teacher: Understanding Process Tracing in Political Science and Politics*, 44, no. 4, 2011, pp. 823-830.

² See John D. Corciari, *Hedging in international relations: an introduction in International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 19, Issue 3, September 2019, pp. 367-374.

³ Soft balancing means the use of subtle and non-aggressive ways and tools to limit the power and influence of a state which is considered a threat, because of its power and divergent interests. The main preoccupation is to avoid direct confrontation with the opponent. See T.V. Paul, *Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy in International Security* 30, no. 1, Summer 2005. For China's specific case, see Stephan Gill, *China's soft balancing strategy and the role of resource investment*, <https://yonseijournal.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/china-soft-balancing.pdf>, accessed on 3 April 2026.

⁴ Kaize Zhu, *Multilateralism and China's Hedging Strategy*, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2024/02/multilateralism-and-chinas-hedging-strategy/>, 7 February 2024.

⁵ Russia-China bilateral trade amounted to \$235 billion in December 2025. Also, some Chinese boats have been accused of cutting subsea cables in the Baltic Sea. According to some experts "In August 2025 alone, China exported a record

328,000 miles of fiber-optic cable and nearly \$50 million worth of lithium-ion batteries to Russia, reinforcing its role as the Kremlin's primary wartime supplier of dual-use materials. Chinese engineers working at Russian drone facilities are adapting civilian quadcopters, such as the Autel Max 4T, for combat use." See Maksym Beznosiuk, *China Is the Weak Link in Europe's Ukraine Strategy in Strategic Europe*, 11 November 2025.

⁶ E. Yeh, *Funding war, courting crisis: Why China's support for Russia requires a European response*, <https://ecfr.eu/article/funding-war-courting-crisis-why-chinas-support-for-russia-requires-a-european-response/>, 9 March 2026.

⁷ Ellen Nakashima, Zhao Long, Pavlo Klimkin, and Eric Ciaramella, *Is China Willing to Influence Russia on the Ukraine War?*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2025/03/is-china-willing-to-influence-russia-on-the-ukraine-war>, 4 March 2025.

⁸ *China Brief*, Volume 25, Issue 18, 5 October 2025, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/CB-V-25-Issue-18-October-5-1.pdf>

⁹ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/c103372/202201/1156514.shtml>, 29 November 2012.

¹⁰ *Political Relations between Ukraine and China*, <https://china.mfa.gov.ua/en/partnership/political-relations-between-ukraine-and-china>, 26 May 2022.

¹¹ J.T. Psaropulous, *How China forgot promises and 'debts' to Ukraine, and backed Russia's war*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/8/how-china-forgot-promises-and-debts-to-ukraine-and-backed-russias-war>, 8 September 2025.

¹² PLA is the official name of the Chinese Armed Forces. Chris Alden, Mariia Zolkina and Lukas Fiala, *Understanding the 'China Factor' in the Russia-Ukraine War*, PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform School of Law, Old College, The University of Edinburgh South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL, <https://peacerep.org/publication/understanding-the-china-factor-in-the-russia-ukraine-war/>, 28 August 2026.

¹³ These votes took place during the 11th Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly, convened after Russia vetoed Security Council action. China constantly abstained rather than voting against the resolutions, positioning itself as formally neutral while avoiding direct condemnation of Russia.

¹⁴ J.T. Psaropulous, *art. cit.*

¹⁵ "From 2021 to 2023, China's share of Russia's dual-use imports grew from approximately 30% to

66%, making it Russia's dominant supplier of goods with potential military applications. By 2023 China accounted for approximately 90% of goods imports covered under the G7 Common High Priority Items List (CHPL) and, in 2025, EU sanctions envoy David O'Sullivan estimated that China supplied 80% of the components used in Russian weapons production." (See E. Yeh, *art. cit.*)

¹⁶ H. Tetiana, *Trade between China and Russia declines for first time after five years of growth* – Reuters, <https://ukranews.com/en/news/1128444/trade-between-china-and-russia-declines-for-first-time-after-five-years-of-growth-reuters>, 2 March 2026.

¹⁷ Pierre Andrieu, *China's Strategy in the Ukraine War and the Shaping of a Post-Conflict Order*, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/chinas-strategy-ukraine-war-and-shaping-post-conflict-order>, 2 March 2026.

¹⁸ Even the military drones made by Ukrainian companies, most of them, contain Chinese components. Only in 11 March 2026, Kyiv announced its first drones without any Chinese pieces. See <https://defence24.com/armed-forces/ukraine-is-getting-closer-to-independent-drone-production>, accessed on 12 March 2026.

¹⁹ Kevin Rudd, *On Xi Jinping*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2024, p. 12.

²⁰ Da Wei, *What Does China Want in Ukraine?*, in *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/what-does-china-want-ukraine>, 29 July 2025.

²¹ Alicja Bachulska, Mark Leonard, *China and Ukraine: The Chinese Debate about Russia's war and its meaning for the world*, Policy Brief, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/china-and-ukraine-the-chinese-debate-about-russias-war-and-its-meaning-for-the-world/>, retrieved on July 2023.

²² *Idem*, p. 3.

²³ *Idem*.

²⁴ *Idem*.

²⁵ *Idem*.

²⁶ Yang Xuguang, "Russia's Countermeasures in Response to the Maximum Pressure and Their Effects", *International Strategic Studies*, 3rd Issue, 2022, pp. 11-22. See p. 11.

²⁷ S. McCarthy, *Chinese ambassador sparks European outrage over suggestion former Soviet states don't exist*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/24/china/china-ambassador-lu-shaye-baltic-soviet-states-europe-intl-hnk>, 23 April 2023. Shaye said that: "Even these ex-Soviet countries don't have an effective status in international law because there was no international agreement to materialise their

status as sovereign countries," and the question of Crimea "depends on how the problem is perceived" as the region was "at the beginning Russian" and then "offered to Ukraine during the Soviet era".

²⁸ Alicja Bachulska, Mark Leonard, *op. cit.* The researcher who criticised Russia's behaviour was Feng Yujun, director of the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, p. 7.

²⁹ *Idem*, p. 7.

³⁰ Chen Jian is the director of NYU Shanghai-ECNU Center on Global History, Economy and Culture, and a researcher at Central Institute of Party's History and Literature. His main theory of democracy is structured around the concept of the "whole-process People's Democracy", which integrates electoral democracy, consultative democracy, decision-making, management, and centralised supervision. The Party's leadership and people's participation are the two main components. It is a manifesto of one-party system, rejecting multi-party systems as ineffective and leading to intra-social conflicts.

³¹ Chen Jian, *What Kind of Democracy is China's Democracy*, China Intercontinental Press, 2021, p. 21.

³² M. Mirovalev, 'Pro-Russian neutrality': How Ukraine sees China's emerging role, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/18/how-ukraine-views-chinas-role-in-peace-settlement?utm_source=chatgpt.com, 18 May 2023.

³³ *Idem*.

³⁴ *Idem*.

³⁵ Maksym Beznosiuk, *op. cit.*

³⁶ *Idem*.

³⁷ *China Assails Soviet Afghan Role*, in *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/12/30/archives/china-assails-soviet-afghan-role-east-germans-accuse-west.html>, 30 December 1979.

³⁸ Famous US journalist Anne Applebaum thinks that the Xi-Putin meeting on 4 February 2022, and their joint statement on the 'no limits' strategic partnership is a proof that Xi had tacitly accepted Russia's plan to begin an aggression, even if he never agreed to Putin's obsession with abolishing Ukrainian existence. Anne Applebaum, *Autocracy. Inc. The Dictators Who Want to Run the World*, 2024, the Romanian translation *Axa autocraților*, Kronika, Bucharest, 2025, p. 21.

³⁹ Camilla Tenna Nørup Sørensen, *Sino-Russian Alignment Stopping at the Nuclear Threshold*, <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/sino-russian-alignment-stopping-at-the-nuclear-threshold/>, 26 August 2025.

⁴⁰ Zelenskyy urges China's Xi to help end Russia's war in Ukraine, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/4/zelenskyy-urges-chinas-xi-to-help-end-russias-war-in-ukraine>, 4 August 2022.

⁴¹ Steve Tsang, Olivia Cheng, *The Political Thought of Xi Jinping*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2024, p. 199. The authors think that Xi Jinping is not interested in a global policeman's role for his country, similar with the one the USA traditionally played, and "he has little interest in delivering on global public good as one might expect of a status-seeking rising power in the 21st century".

⁴² *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367485.html, 24 February 2023.

⁴³ *Putin and Lukashenko's Nuclear Blackmail: Current Threats to the International Security System*, https://prismua.org/en/582976-2/?utm_source=chatgpt.com urity System, retrieved on March 2, 2026.

⁴⁴ The Qing Empire ceded vast territories to the Russian Empire in the 19th century through the so-called "unequal treaties", particularly the Treaty of Aigun (1858) and the Convention of Peking (1860). These agreements transferred large areas north of the Amur River and east of the Ussuri River (today part of Russia's Far East, including the area of Vladivostok) to Russia.

⁴⁵ See Yang Xuguang, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Anastasia Protz, *Poll: 80% of Ukrainians have negative view of China's leader, 99% of Russia's ruler*, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2026/01/30/8018714/>, 30 January 2026.

⁴⁷ E. Yeh, *art. cit.* "The reciprocal dynamic between Russia and China is prolonging the war in Ukraine and testing the Western response to the conflict. It is also affecting the strategic calculus around Taiwan. Together, these developments facilitate a strategic 'coupling' of European and Indo-Pacific security, inexorably linking the two theatres and having broader implications for global stability.

⁴⁸ Anastasiia Malenko, Yuliia Dysa and Tom Balmforth, *Zelenskiy accuses China of supplying Russia with weapons*, https://www.reuters.com/world/zelenskiy-says-ukraine-has-evidence-china-supplying-russia-with-artillery-2025-04-17/?utm_source=chatgpt.com, 17 April 2025.

⁴⁹ "Great changes unseen in a century" (百年未有之大变局) is a syntagma that officially entered the Chinese Communist Party's lexicon in 2017, when the then State Councillor Yang

Jiechi presented it as a guiding tenet of "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy". This official text was formally adopted by the Party during a 2018 Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, where Xi informed the Chinese diplomats that "China now finds itself in the best period for development it has seen since the advent of the modern era; [simultaneously], the world faces great changes unseen in a century. These two [trends] are interwoven, advancing in lockstep; each stimulates the other. Now, and in the years to come, many advantageous international conditions exist for success in foreign affairs (Xi 2020)". See <https://chinaopensourceobservatory.org/glossary/great-changes-unseen-in-a-century>, accessed on 2 March 2026.

⁵⁰ The Five principles of peaceful coexistence, initiated by China in 1953–1954, are seen as the foundation of its foreign policy. They include the mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality in rights, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

⁵¹ Da Wei, *art. cit.*

⁵² Vita Golod, "Sino-Ukrainian Relations: Strategic Trade and Geopolitical Balancing," China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE), 13 October 2025, quoted by Pierre Andrieu, *China's Strategy in the Ukraine War and the Shaping of a Post-Conflict Order*, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/chinas-strategy-ukraine-war-and-shaping-post-conflict-order>, 2 March 2026.

⁵³ The Global Security Initiative Concept, https://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/pdf/The_Global_Security_Initiative_Concept_Paper, accessed on 3 March 2026.

⁵⁴ *China's National Security in the New Era* - (May 2025), Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, www.andrew-erickson.com/2025/05/new-white-paper-chinas-national-security-in-the-new-era/. See also China Aerospace Studies Institute, *In their own words - China's National Security in the New Era*, www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2025-09-08%202025%20China%20National%20Security%20White%20Paper%202025.pdf?ver=nA5qS3sBOYdpEoW77qhfW%3d%3d, accessed on 10 February 2026.

⁵⁵ "The recent information is that, Russia has been using Chinese satellites and taking photos of the details of the objects on nuclear facilities," said Zelensky for ABC News on 24 September 2024. *Russia using Chinese satellites to photograph Ukraine's nuclear facilities: Zelenskyy*, Burc Eruygur,

24 September 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/russia-using-chinese-satellites-to-photograph-ukraine-s-nuclear-facilities-zelensky/3340454>, retrieved on 22 February 2026.

⁵⁶ Chris Alden, Mariia Zolkina and Lukas Fiala, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Andreea Brinza, *In or out of the 14+1 format, Romania's short-lived romance with China is over*, <https://risap.eu/in-or-out-of-the-141-format-ro->

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⁵⁸ Șerban F. Cioculescu, *Rethinking the China-Russia Relations in the Context of the War in Ukraine*, Monitor Strategic, Nos. 1-2/2022, p. 30, <https://ispaim.mapn.ro/webroot/fileslib/upload/files/Monitor%20Strategic/ms122022.pdf>, accessed on 10 February 2026.

Organised Crime and Human Trafficking: A Threat to Urban Security

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Abstract

Armed conflicts have evolved from conventional inter-state wars into complex asymmetric confrontations, involving a wide range of non-state actors, such as terrorist and criminal organisations (e.g., Boko Haram, Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel, Baja California Cartel, or the Camorra). Among these, organised criminal groups and violent networks have become critical actors, shaping not only security dynamics, but also migration and refugee flows. Through activities such as human trafficking, migrant smuggling and other forms of transnational organised crime, these groups exploit instability, generate illicit profits, and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of immigrants. Illustrative cases, such as the Medellín Cartel's bombing of an Avianca flight in 1989, the assassination of Mexican Cardinal Posadas Ocampo in 1993, and the murders of Judge Giovanni Falcone and Prosecutor Paolo Borsellino by the Italian Mafia in 1992, reveal how criminal networks operate within the nexus of violence, political fragility, and human mobility. The International Criminal Court (ICC) demonstrates how non-state actors exploit conflict for profit, including through human trafficking and organised crime. Cases such as Darfur (Sudan) and the Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda) show how these networks drive displacement, placing pressure on urban areas hosting migrants and refugees, illustrating how such crimes exacerbate urban insecurity and migration pressure.

Keyword: *organised crime, cartel, migration, violence, urban in security*

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1. Introduction and Historical Context

The earliest cities date back thousands of years before our era, with urban settlements evolving over time. Today, asymmetric warfare has become more prevalent than conventional inter-state war, and it is conceptually distinct from the forms of warfare associated with pre-state societies.

Asymmetric warfare involves an unequal confrontation between a state and a non-state

entity, such as terrorist organisations (e.g., ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or Al-Qaeda, or less well-known ones like Boko Haram), narcoterrorist groups (such as the Medellín Cartel, Jalisco New Generation Cartel, Baja California Cartel, or the Sinaloa Group), organised crime groups (like the Yakuza, Cosa Nostra, Camorra, MS-13, or the Triads), or violent extremist groups (such as ETA (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna - Basque Homeland and Liberty), the IRA (Irish Republican Army), or FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de

Colombia - The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)).

In our presentation, we will focus primarily on the threat posed by organised crime groups and violent criminal activity. According to the FBI, organised crime groups are entities formed to commit criminal offences. Furthermore, Article 367 (6) of the Romanian Criminal Code defines an organised criminal group as: “A structured group, consisting of three or more persons, established for a certain period of time and acting in a coordinated manner for the purpose of committing one or more offences.”

Some well-known events involving organised crime include: the 1989 bombing of Avianca flight by the Medellín Cartel, the 1993 assassination of Mexican Cardinal Posadas Ocampo by the Baja California Cartel, and the 1992 killings of Judge Giovanni Falcone and Prosecutor Paolo Borsellino by the Italian Mafia. In Romania, a notable case was the foiled improvised explosive device (IED) attack in Piatra-Neamț in 2013. Organised crime activities are diverse, but in our country one of the most profitable remains human trafficking.

The threat posed by organised crime is real, and to reduce the phenomenon, authorities must focus both on prevention and enforcement, with the protection of all citizens being a key priority.

2. Urban Settlements in Antiquity and Threats to Their Security

Some modern cities are built directly over the ruins of ancient fortresses. Urban settlements have existed for thousands of years before Christ. Some of the oldest and most well-known cities in the world include Jericho, Palestine (8000 BCE or possibly as early as 11,000 BCE), Damascus, Syria (5000 BCE), Jerusalem, Israel (4500 BCE), Rome, Italy (founded in 753 BCE), Athens, Greece (around 5000 BCE), Sparta, Greece (8th century BCE), Thessaloniki, Greece (founded in 315 BCE)¹.

Athens is recognised as the world's first model of democracy. Despite this, discontent over the exclusion of certain social categories from the right to vote, along with various social issues, ultimately led to the crisis of Athenian democracy.

At the core of this democratic decline lay widespread dissatisfaction and the deepening of social inequalities. Notably, the enfranchised Athenian citizenry had developed the legal and civic awareness necessary to amend their own laws when those laws no longer aligned with the social or political realities of the time.

In many cases, in response to external threats, whether natural disasters or dangers posed by other human groups (which we will discuss shortly), they would adapt their legal framework to maintain public order and seek the most effective legal remedies for emerging challenges.

A distinctive feature of the legislative process in the Athenian *polis* was the existence of so-called “entrenched clauses”.

Here, we can observe the earliest forms of constitutional law, that is, laws that hold supreme authority within the state and are immune to ordinary legislative change. These entrenched clauses contributed to the *polis*'s legal credibility in the eyes of other city-states. However, they also created rigidity, making it difficult to enact necessary legal reforms, even when changing circumstances would have warranted adjustments to those very provisions.²

Rome, arguably one of the most renowned city-states in the world, was founded in 753 BCE and has a history marked by turbulence and violence. The renowned archaeologist Andrea Carandini³ firmly asserts that Rome was indeed founded by the two legendary figures, Romulus and Remus⁴.

Now that we've introduced several cities from Antiquity, we must also examine the main threats they faced during that era. Naturally, even in those times, there were manifestations of what we would now classify as organised crime, though the terminology and structure were different, and such activities were known in other forms.

The primary threats to urban security⁵ in that period included rival city-states/*poleis* (the most notable example being the long-standing rivalry between Athens and Sparta)⁶ and barbarian groups, a well-known threat, especially to Rome. Some historians argue that these groups played a key role in the gradual fall of

the Roman Empire, as their repeated invasions progressively weakened Rome until its eventual collapse. During the Christian era, the most prominent barbarian tribes were the Goths, Vandals, and Huns.

Also, pirates posed a serious threat to maritime transport since ancient times. In the Mediterranean Sea, no vessel was spared if it crossed paths with pirates. Even Pharaoh Akhenaten (1353-1336 BCE) struggled to suppress this phenomenon. Pirates reached a period of prominence between 476 and 1500 CE, during which pirates frequently disrupted trade, plundered ships, and destabilised coastal regions⁷. However, the Golden Age of Piracy occurred later, spanning the 17th and 18th centuries.⁸

Bandits or groups of highway robbers may represent the earliest form of what we now define as organised crime. Today, there are numerous definitions of organised crime. According to the FBI, organised crime refers to groups formed for the purpose of committing serious offences, such as drug trafficking, arms trafficking, and human trafficking.⁹

The FBI also shows that organised crime groups have become transnational and are increasingly infiltrating various sectors, including legitimate businesses. During that time, bands of robbers operated in an organised manner to commit their crimes. Panos Sophoulis explains how bandits terrorised the Balkan Mountains between the years 800 and 1500. They attacked travellers and even looted military convoys, acting as highway pirates of the mountain roads.¹⁰

According to the Romanian Criminal Code, Article 233: "Theft committed by using violence or threats, or by rendering the victim unconscious or unable to defend themselves, as well as theft followed by the use of such means in order to retain the stolen property, to eliminate traces of the offence, or to secure the perpetrator's escape, shall be punishable by imprisonment from 2 to 7 years and the prohibition of certain rights."¹¹

It can be observed that robbery was far more common than piracy, since, in those times, it was much easier to rob someone on land – especially in forested or marshy areas – whereas piracy required access to a ship or other vessel.

Another historical reference to robbery is found in the Biblical episode of the two thieves who were crucified alongside Jesus Christ.¹²

Nowadays, the current state of research includes theories from authors such as James Der Derian, Randall D. Law, Felia Allum, Tatiana Tropina, Petruț Ciobanu, Emilian Stancu, Atanasiu Crușu and Cristian Mitrache.¹³ These specialists in the field demonstrate that organised crime consists of groups established for the purpose of generating profit through illegal activities, many of which constitute a serious threat to national and urban security owing to their high level of violence and their growing connection to the asymmetric and hybrid dimensions of contemporary warfare.

Our objective is to show how criminal groups, such as cartels, use violence to control territories and how vulnerable individuals, such as immigrants from war-torn states, can become victims of human trafficking.

3. Research Methodology

- The research is descriptive, as it identifies the main threats posed by organised crime groups;
- The research is explanatory, as we will try to analyse and subsequently show how authorities should act to prevent and combat urban security incidents; the research also examines the causes of these incidents, which will be presented as case studies of several metropolises;
- The research is applicative, as we also try to propose improvements related to urban security within Romanian metropolises and the prevention of security incidents;
- The authors position their analysis within an interdisciplinary framework at the intersection of history, law, and security studies, thereby treating organised crime as a multi-dimensional phenomenon whose evolution, normative regulation, and implications for security can only be fully grasped through a combined analytical lens;
- This research adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodological approach grounded in the analysis of the relevant scholarly literature and the jurisprudence of the

ICC, with particular reference to the manner in which organised crime affects national and urban security. We proceed from the premise that organised crime cannot be understood solely as a matter of criminal law enforcement, but must also be examined as a phenomenon with broader implications (for institutional resilience, social order, and security governance). The review of the literature provides the conceptual and theoretical framework necessary for situating organised crime at the intersection of law and security, while the analysis of the Court's jurisprudence offers insight into the legal reasoning through which complex forms of violence, organisation, and transnational criminality may be interpreted. In this way, the research combines doctrinal and analytical perspectives in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between organised crime, national security and urban security.

Based on the research findings, we propose several measures to prevent and combat the phenomenon. The *expected outcome* is to demonstrate how human trafficking can be reduced through prevention applied in disadvantaged environments, particularly by preventing school dropouts among vulnerable individuals.

4. Asymmetric Warfare and New Threats to Urban Security from the Perspective of Human-Driven Actions

While in the past war was typically waged between two city-states, with armies positioned face-to-face or besieging a fortified city and the outcome decided through direct clashes, today, warfare has evolved to an entirely different level. Since the paradigm of conflict shifted – starting with the Cold War, where intelligence services played a crucial role – a new form of warfare has emerged: the asymmetric warfare. This involves a shift where states no longer engage in warfare against other states, but rather against non-state entities.¹⁴ In recent years, great powers have shown that they may still resort to conventional warfare in pursuit of territorial objectives, whereas terrorist

organisations and, in some contexts, organised criminal groups tend to rely on asymmetric methods and, at times, hybrid tactics, owing to the imbalance of power between such actors and the state.

In these new forms of warfare, non-state entities, such as terrorist groups, organised crime networks, or hacker collectives, often employ hybrid tactics to achieve their objectives. Hybrid warfare relies on less conventional tactics that can undermine the defensive capabilities of modern states. It is often non-state in nature, with actors such as terrorist groups employing tactics like spreading fear through acts of terrorism or engaging in criminal activities to gain power and influence within the target state, thereby weakening the nation's internal strength and resilience.¹⁵

Author Michael Krepon explains that asymmetric warfare is waged across military, political, economic, cultural, civil, and informational domains. Its primary objective, we argue, is to subjugate the civilian population, targeting societal cohesion and stability rather than seeking conventional military defeat. Disinformation¹⁶ plays a significant role in modern conflicts, often operating alongside fake news. These are intended to generate fear, create destabilisation, and undermine the authority of state security institutions and the political class, representing genuine threats to national security, particularly in NATO member states. Such non-conventional forms of attack are employed in both urban and rural environments to spread chaos and fear, diverging significantly from the methods of traditional warfare.¹⁷

Terrorism is perhaps one of the most well-known types of threats encountered in both asymmetric and hybrid warfare. It has multiple definitions, but is widely accepted as a form of unlawful violence directed against non-combatants, often motivated by political, religious, or ideological reasons. Its primary objectives typically include political influence, the generation of fear, and the destabilisation of legitimate authority.¹⁸ This is aimed at illegitimately taking power by exerting pressure on state leadership through the population. There are various manifestations of terrorism, but one of the most significant is *state terrorism*.¹⁹

5. Organised Crime: A Threat to Urban Security

Organised crime refers to a group, specifically an organised criminal group, or multiple groups of individuals united under the structure of an organisation created for the purpose of committing criminal offences. Here we will show that the concept of urban security is real and analyse how these groups create insecurity in the urban environment, as part of our contribution.

In criminal law doctrine, this form of criminal activity is classified as a constituted plurality, representing a type of offender plurality in which several individuals associate with the intent of committing one or more offences. Thus, a constituted plurality is formed, which is criminalised as a distinct and autonomous offence.²⁰

However, Romanian criminal law doctrine also provides other definitions. One such definition states: “Organised crime, in essence, may be defined as that segment of criminal activity involving illegal operations likely to seriously affect certain sectors of economic, social, and political life. These activities are carried out through various methods and means, in a constant, planned, and covert manner, by associations of individuals with a clearly defined internal hierarchy, specialised structures, and self-protection mechanisms, with the aim of obtaining illicit profits at exceptionally high levels.”²¹

The formation of an organised criminal group is separately criminalised under Article 367 of the Romanian Criminal Code, precisely due to its high level of dangerousness. This incrimination underscores the importance of deterring individuals from engaging in the creation of such groups. According to Article 367, paragraph 6 of the Romanian Criminal Code: “An organised criminal group is defined as a structured group consisting of three or more persons, established for a certain period of time and acting in a coordinated manner for the purpose of committing one or more criminal offences.”

All these groups are structured around their own internal rules, the violation of which is often severely punished. According

to INTERPOL, some of the most notorious examples include the Yakuza (the Japanese mafia), the Italian mafia families (e.g., Cosa Nostra), professional criminal organisations, money laundering networks, and international terrorist organisations, as noted by author Petruț Ciobanu.

In North American criminological thought, criminal organisations are primarily involved in racketeering (extortion through protection fees), the commission of theft under aggravating circumstances, often carried out in an organised fashion, the formation of street gangs (such as Colombian groups engaged in drug trafficking in the US, motorcycle gangs, or ethnically-based groups like MS-13), as well as terrorist activities, according to Petruț Ciobanu. As we can see, in both perspectives, terrorism is considered a distinct and particularly dangerous category of organised crime. The fundamental rule of any criminal organisation is *Omertà*, commonly known as the “law of silence.”²² In essence, these groups are established to carry out acts of significantly heightened gravity, well above the average level of criminality, which are prohibited by criminal law and have a direct impact on the lives of citizens, particularly in urban areas.

In the following section, we will conduct *an analysis of selected offences* within the sphere of organised crime, with the aim of illustrating the high level of social dangerousness these groups pose, as established by the norms of Romanian criminal legislation.

According to Article 2, paragraph 1 of Law no. 143/2000 “The cultivation, production, manufacture, experimentation, extraction, preparation, transformation, offering, sale, distribution, delivery under any title, dispatch, transport, procurement, purchase, possession, or any other operations concerning the circulation of risk drugs, without legal authorisation, shall be punishable by imprisonment from 3 to 10 years and the prohibition of certain rights.”²³ According to paragraph 2 of the same article, “If the acts provided for in paragraph (1) involve high-risk drugs, the penalty shall be imprisonment from 5 to 15 years and the prohibition of certain rights.”²⁴ Prohibited substances known as drugs have harmful effects on individuals, as they can

alter behaviour, induce violent tendencies, or, in many cases, lead to death by overdose. Thus, the legislator found it necessary to strictly regulate this issue. Moreover, drug distributors are often violent and frequently become involved in territorial disputes. Probably one of the most lucrative countries for the drug trade, Mexico is currently facing a severe crisis due to the cartels that have taken control. There are entire regions under their dominance where authorities no longer dare to intervene.²⁵

Human trafficking is an equally serious issue, with a high likelihood that the actions of groups engaged in this activity may be even more harmful. This is due to the fact that their operations often violate the physical and psychological integrity of victims, many of whom are ultimately killed by the traffickers. According to the US Embassy in Romania, as of 2024, despite increased efforts to prevent and combat this phenomenon, current measures remain insufficient to produce concrete results. Moreover, Romania has ranked for many years as the leading EU country in terms of the number of individuals who fall victim to trafficking, and this number reaches alarming levels each year.²⁶ The European Commission reports that trafficked persons from Romania are exploited in nearly all European countries.²⁷ Human trafficking is punishable under Article 210, paragraph 1 of the Romanian Criminal Code. Organised crime groups also operate in areas such as blackmail, extortion rackets, arms trafficking, and numerous other activities that pose serious threats to society, particularly to urban areas, especially due to the violence often associated with such operations.²⁸

Before moving on to the presentation of case studies and specific legal scenarios that illustrate how these phenomena operate, we will first conduct an in-depth overview of the Mexican cartel problem, as several of the case studies originate from that region. Professor Stephen D. Morris, a specialist in political science and head of the Department of Diplomacy and International Relations Studies²⁹, from the University of South Alabama, explains that any increase in criminal phenomena, such as cartels in Mexico or elsewhere in the world, is always directly proportional to the rise in corruption.

In his work, *Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico*, it is shown that the violence of the cartels and the drug trafficking phenomenon escalate with the support “hired,” so to speak, of state officials who collaborate with representatives of organised crime. By accepting bribes, these officials facilitate and support drug trafficking, thereby allowing the power of the cartels to grow stronger. President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa³⁰ tried to launch in Mexico the so-called “drug war”, through which he sought to undermine the power of the cartels.³¹

Historically, Mexican cartels did not hold the level of power they possess today. In the beginning, state authorities maintained control, but a turning point came with the emergence of the Guadalajara Cartel.

The drug war extends beyond Mexico’s borders, reaching into the United States. Significant quantities of illegal substances cross the border through Baja California, entering Los Angeles, and subsequently spreading to major cities across of the US. The drug war is being waged on the streets of America’s major cities, and US institutions have launched both law enforcement operations and public awareness campaigns, including through films and television series, aimed at reducing drug use and weakening the power of cartels and street gangs.³²

However, the phenomenon began with the rise to power of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, who founded the Guadalajara Cartel in the late 1970s. Before its establishment, Mexican authorities maintained control over criminal activity, and whenever criminal groups began to gain strength, they were dismantled through state intervention. Miguel Ángel, after managing, with the help of Rafael Caro Quintero³³, a new strain of cannabis that allowed for higher yields of extractable substances at exponentially lower costs. This success enabled him to gain the support of gang leaders as well as senior officials within the DFS (Dirección Federal de Seguridad)³⁴ to form the cartel, clearly with the support of state institutions. Later, after the DFS was dismantled, and was suspected of collusion with the cartels in the murder of DEA agent Kiki Camarena³⁵, Miguel lost his power and was imprisoned in 1989. He is still

serving his sentence to this day. The result of his arrest was the fragmentation of the organisation and the emergence of numerous cartels, each beginning to control significant regions of the state.³⁶

What happened in Mexico shows us how the authorities, very slowly but steadily, lost their functions and control to the cartels, which have now managed to geographically dominate territories, with military forces and local public authorities chosen by criminal organisations.

This decline of state power illustrates how organised crime gains ground if it is not stopped in its early stages of development. It becomes very easy, if criminal activity is neglected by the authorities, for it to acquire the necessary power to evade the law and even to confront state leadership. One of the tactics used by these gangsters is terrorist acts, as will be seen in the case studies we are about to analyse. From a sociological perspective, people often become involved in crime because poverty leaves them with few alternatives. However, the case of Henry Hill shows that some may choose to join the Cosa Nostra for anti-establishment reasons.

6. Human Trafficking

According to the European Parliament, “Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.”³⁷ This offence is particularly serious, as it violates individuals’ right to liberty, often forcing victims into begging, forced labour, or sexual exploitation by criminal groups.

Human trafficking poses a direct threat to urban security, especially as minors from these areas are particularly vulnerable and at risk of being exploited.

The severity of the phenomenon is also reflected in the fact that, under Romanian law, offences related to human trafficking are not subject to the statute of limitations. It can be observed that for the offences provided under Articles 209, 210, and 211, prescription does not remove criminal liability.³⁸ A particular is-

sue arises in conflict zones in the Middle East, where illegal migration can serve as a cover for human trafficking. Populations often attempt to flee, and in many cases, those trying to leave the country illegally may become victims of human trafficking.

In the sphere of international criminal jurisdictions, particularly in the jurisprudence of the ICC, we refer to several key insights drawn from two cases that fall within the scope of asymmetric conflict, more precisely non-international armed conflicts, namely, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) case in Uganda and the Darfur (Sudan) case. These cases reflect, *inter alia*, the dynamics of migration flows, which may involve both victims and perpetrators, as well as the emergence of territories controlled by organised criminal groups or so-called “warlords”. With regard to the LRA case, the ICC classified the crimes committed as war crimes (including murder, cruel treatment of civilians, intentionally directing an attack against a civilian population, pillaging, inducing rape and forced enlistment of children) and crimes against humanity (including murder, enslavement, sexual enslavement, rape and inhumane acts of inflicting serious bodily injury and suffering)³⁹, and in the Darfur (Sudan) case, the ICC classified the offences committed as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide (genocide by killing, genocide by causing serious bodily or mental harm and genocide by deliberately inflicting on each target group conditions of life calculated to bring about the group’s physical destruction), war crimes (murder, attacks against the civilian population, destruction of property, rape, pillaging, and outrage upon personal dignity, violence to life and person; intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a peacekeeping mission) and crimes against humanity (murder, persecution, forcible transfer of population, rape, inhumane acts, imprisonment or severe deprivation of liberty, torture, extermination and torture)⁴⁰.

In the context of these international crimes, the serious violation of the rule of law and fundamental human rights makes forced migration a clear indication of the state’s inability to protect its population. This is particularly

evident in the conflict between the Ugandan authorities and the armed group LRA, which gave rise to one of the most severe humanitarian crises in recent history⁴¹ and approximately 1.7 million people from the Acholi subregion were forcibly displaced.⁴² After being militarily forced to withdraw from Ugandan territory, the LRA continued its violent activities in the border region between South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The operations carried out by the LRA in these regions triggered a wave of forced migration, with a profound impact on the civilian population.

At the same time, reports issued by the United Nations highlight the serious scale of crimes committed against children, with an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 minors abducted and forced to join the group.⁴³ These actions constitute, without question, a flagrant violation of fundamental human rights and a major catalyst for regional instability.

In Darfur, migration has long served as a form of economic adaptation and survival. The local population traditionally migrated either seasonally or long-term, to work or in response to food shortages, moving both within the region and towards central Sudan, Libya, Chad, Egypt, and even the Gulf States. Beginning in 2003, with the outbreak of armed conflict, these traditional routes were disrupted, and millions of people were forcibly displaced. As the crisis dragged on, migration resumed particularly towards Libya and many young people from Darfur fled to Chad, Egypt, South Sudan, and even Israel, in search of safety and a more stable life⁴⁴.

We thus observe that forced migration, in the circumstances analysed, is not merely a collateral consequence of conflict, but a profound expression of the state's failure to provide protection. In the silence of the displaced, in their uncertain journeys, we read not only individual tragedy, but the cumulative failure of institutions that should have prevented, protected, and responded. In the face of such ruptures, international law cannot remain a bystander. It is called upon not only to sanction, but also to reaffirm, firmly and humanely, that the protection of the human person is not optional, but fundamental.

7. Case Studies

In 2019, Ovidio Guzmán, the son of the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel – a cartel that splintered from the Guadalajara Cartel, originally founded by Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo – was arrested. However, the arrest was immediately followed by a violent offensive launched by the urban guerrilla forces of the Sinaloa group. Sinaloa and its sicarios carried out acts of terrorism in broad daylight in the city of Culiacán, a major Mexican metropolis, ultimately leading to the release of Ovidio Guzmán.⁴⁵ If we analyse what happened, we can clearly see how terrorism was used as a means to circumvent Mexican criminal law. In essence, this case reveals how Ovidio held the power to place himself above the law, undermining the authority of the judicial system through violence and coercion.

In 1993, Mexican Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo was killed near the airport. According to OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) information, it was found that he was probably not the target of the attack, and the violence was related to a clash between cartels. In the series *Narcos: Mexico*, which also serves as a documentary, it is specified that the gunmen were aiming to kill El Chapo and belonged to the Baja California Cartel, while the Cardinal happened to be there, without being the intended target of the attack.⁴⁶

Considering that we have chosen Mexico as the case study country for the danger posed by organised crime groups, we will also shift our attention to the city of Los Angeles. It is located near the Mexican border, and, as previously explained, the violence caused by drug trafficking or narcoterrorist groups has also extended into California (USA).

Currently, efforts are being made in Los Angeles, as well as in other American cities, to reduce gun violence through various projects. In the case of Los Angeles, the police, specifically the LAPD, has launched public campaigns in this direction.⁴⁷

We can observe that organised crime represents a real threat to urban safety. Today, these groups have also modernised. In addition to drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, extortion (racketeering), or

street violence, criminal groups now also operate in the realm of social media and the virtual environment.

At present, there is also cybercrime, which refers to criminal activities committed online – cybercriminality. Given that virtual activity is now present everywhere, the online space hosts not only individuals with legitimate interests, but also those seeking to break the law and commit cyber-related offences. As a result, the number of criminal acts committed in cyberspace is growing at an alarming rate.⁴⁸

The actions of criminal groups diversify depending on the environment, available opportunities, time, and access to technology. Regardless of the circumstances or setting, they manage to persist. **We argue that**, regardless of the severity of penalties or the integrity of law-abiding citizens, there will always be antisocial individuals driven by a desire to break the law and accumulate substantial profits through illicit or socially harmful means.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon must be kept under control as much as possible, which means that law enforcement institutions tasked with preventing and combating such criminal acts must identify effective solutions to ensure that these activities remain at minimal levels and do not compromise public safety. It is evident that a safe city, where crime rates are low and violent acts are rare, becomes an attractive environment for investors, corporations, and economic development. Moreover, safe urban areas attract homebuyers and experience continuous development. It is well established that in every metropolitan area, there are neighbourhoods with elevated crime rates, where property values tend to be lower and residents often refrain from going out after certain hours.

However, assessing whether a city is safe from the perspective of organised criminal activity requires a comprehensive analysis: the overall crime rate, the number and extent of high-risk zones, and the level of threat in the city's most vulnerable districts must all be taken into account. Consequently, for a city to be considered genuinely safe, it must rely not only on law enforcement and crime suppression, but also on robust prevention strategies, aimed at mitigating risks before repressive measures become necessary.

8. Proposals for Institutions

In the final part of this article, we will address how we believe state institutions should act, and present several policy proposals, particularly in the area of prevention. This is essential because, as previously discussed, greater emphasis must be placed on prevention in order to avoid reaching the point where enforcement becomes necessary. This section forms part of our contribution and demonstrates how our research could have an impact on the prevention of the criminal activities that we have exposed.

Poverty-stricken environments, school dropout rates, children in institutional care, and early exposure to drug use are just a few of the underlying risk factors.

In Romania's most recent large-scale anti-drug operation, the youngest drug user identified by the authorities was 8 years old, and the youngest seller was 15, underscoring the urgency of early intervention and comprehensive preventive measures.⁴⁹

9. Authorities – Lines of Action

In the final section of this article, we will present our personal view on how authorities should act in terms of both preventing and combating organised crime in major urban centres.

- Enhancing prevention capabilities. When referring to acts of aggression or violence – such as those we have examined in this paper, carried out by organised crime groups in the context of gang-related conflicts, or by terrorist or violent extremist groups – it is essential that state authorities develop the capacity to prevent such incidents from occurring in the first place, so as to safeguard the physical and psychological integrity of citizens;

- Developing programmes to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those in foster care stay in school and choose a career path, so they can pursue a legitimate profession and avoid the temptation to join criminal groups. It is proven that when people fall below the subsistence level and lack the

means for food, clothing, heating, or medical treatment, the absence of any means of survival leads them to join criminal, terrorist or extremist groups. To prevent this, it is necessary for the state to create programmes that encourage vulnerable young people to stay in school and ultimately find jobs with decent salaries, while also stimulating job creation;

- Protecting children in foster care from physical and sexual abuse is the most important. A recent documentary by the independent Romanian publication *Recorder* shows us how children flee Romanian state foster care centres because of daily physical and sexual abuse. Those children who end up on the streets are highly likely to become victims of human trafficking or be recruited as soldiers for criminal groups, having no income or protection from the state.⁵⁰ This level of protection is equally important for children in impoverished areas;

- Equally important is the prevention of drug use and human trafficking. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns aimed at fostering a culture of security among the civilian population. Such campaigns may include films or public service announcements designed to help young people understand the importance of staying in school, avoiding criminal environments, and protecting themselves from being recruited by trafficking or drug distribution networks;

- For individuals at risk of self-radicalisation, these efforts should also convey the dangers of extremist ideologies and provide guidance on how to avoid falling into such pathways;

- Additional measures may include training sessions, workshops, and seminars involving representatives of state institutions in direct dialogue with members of society, particularly in underprivileged areas, as well as providing psychological counselling and reintegration support for former drug users;

- Another strategic direction is the deterrence of individuals already affiliated with such groups, which can be achieved through the visible presence of law enforcement in vulnerable communities;

- In our view, prevention is the most effective means of combating organised crime, as it is far more logical and impactful to prevent

a harmful event from occurring than to deal with its consequences after the fact;

- Accelerating response to active threats. In situations involving an armed attacker or multiple individuals using firearms or blunt weapons, a rapid and calculated response from the authorities is essential to halt the incident before civilians can be harmed. As a general rule, it is crucial that high-risk individuals are identified in advance and monitored by the competent authorities;

- Mitigating damage. It is necessary to minimise damage as much as possible, particularly to the civilian population, as well as to property. This requires cooperation among authorities to ensure the protection of both civilians and assets;

- Conducting rapid interventions to rescue citizens and providing medical assistance. In the event that an incident occurs despite preventive measures, harm to individuals may still take place. In such cases, emergency medical services, including paramedics, doctors and nurses must respond swiftly and reach the affected areas without delay. At the same time, the police, gendarmerie, and other relevant response units involved in neutralising the threat must also ensure the protection and support of medical teams, facilitating the safe evacuation and transport of injured individuals to medical facilities.

Conclusions

Cities have existed long before the times we live in today. As early as several millennia before Christ, they were known as *poleis* or fortresses, and some demonstrated a level of organisation that would rival even today's administrations. During that period, they were not immune to numerous threats, such as barbarian invasions, banditry, attacks from enemy *poleis* or piracy. Historical sources mention how Egyptian pharaohs attempted to curb piracy, and bandits are even referenced in the Bible, notably the two thieves crucified alongside Jesus Christ.

In modern times, beyond traditional warfare between two military forces, we now witness hybrid warfare, characterised by tactics

such as terrorism, fake news, information operations, and disinformation. These strategies are often employed in asymmetric warfare, which involves confrontations between state and non-state actors, such as terrorist, criminal, or extremist groups. The term “asymmetric” stems from the imbalance of power between a sovereign state and an irregular group, the latter using unconventional tactics to weaken state authority.

Organised crime refers to groups of at least three individuals formed with the intent to break the law. The most common criminal activities used by such groups to generate profit include drug trafficking, arms trafficking, human trafficking, and racketeering – the latter referring to the imposition of so-called “protection taxes” in exchange for immunity from physical or material harm.

The case studies presented – such as the arrest of Ovidio Guzmán, the armed attacks on civilians by the Sinaloa group militias, and the assassination of Mexican Cardinal Posadas Ocampo, allegedly by cartel members illustrate the scale of destruction and fear such organisations can cause, particularly in Mexico.

Authorities must focus strongly on prevention, which includes both deterrence and dissuasion of potential offenders, as well as educational campaigns – including public service announcements, films, and advertisements – aimed at individuals at risk of becoming involved in or victimised by organised crime.

Repression efforts must be prompt, concrete, and decisive. However, civilian lives and property must also be protected, and those injured must receive immediate medical assistance and transportation to medical facilities. In the aftermath, psychological counselling, funded by the state, should be made available to support victims and affected individuals.

In conclusion, organised crime, in its various forms, has existed since antiquity, as there have always been individuals whose principles stood in opposition to the order of the state and society. While this phenomenon cannot be fully eradicated, as it is a permanent reality of any society, its impact on citizens and community life will depend greatly on how it is managed and contained.

Notes

¹ Vladimir Ivanovici, *Care este cel mai vechi oraş din lume locuit în permanenţă*, disponibil la adresa <https://descoperiri.ro/care-este-cel-mai-vechi-oras-din-lume-locuit-in-permanenta/> (accessed on 01.10.2025).

² Melissa Schwartzberg, *Athenian Democracy and Legal Change in The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 2, Washington D.C., 2004, pp. 311-325.

³ Andreea Carandini, *Bibliography*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2025, https://press.princeton.edu/our-authors/carandini-andreea?srltid=AfmBOorr4VnwTgrI7y_4VFWZq_bOfiklfGN4sXdmHun22pfRkFgtcWTq (accessed on 03.10.2025).

⁴ According to tradition, the twins were raised by a she-wolf; following a dispute between them, Romulus killed his brother Remus and became the sole founder of the city of Rome. Andrew Slayman, Marco Merola, Andrea Carandini, Albert Ammerman, *Origins of Rome*, Archaeological Institute of America, Vol. 60, No. 4, Boston, 2007, p. 23.

⁵ According to Article 1 of Romanian Law No. 51/1991, national security is defined as “the condition of legality and of social, economic, and political equilibrium and stability necessary for the existence and development of the Romanian national state as a sovereign, unitary, independent, and indivisible state”. In relation to this definition of national security and to the definition advanced by the Geneva Centre for Security, urban security may be conceptualised as the capacity of institutions to prevent and manage risks arising either from human action or from natural events, thus maintaining a state of balance and safety within the city. For additional details regarding urban security, please see *SSR Backgrounder, Urban Safety and Security*, Geneva: DCAF, 2019, p. 2, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/DCAF_BG_19_Urban%20Safety%20and%20Security_1.pdf (accessed on 29.03.2025).

In the medieval period, urban security was not conceptualised as a distinct and systematically defined notion in the modern sense of the term, although medieval cities did develop legal and institutional mechanisms aimed at maintaining order and protecting the urban community.

⁶ César Fornis, *The rivalry between ancient Athens and Sparta is infamous—but they may have been more ‘frenemies’*, National Geographic, Washington, D.C., 3 October 2024.

⁷ Joshua J. Mark, *Pirates in the Ancient Mediterranean*, World History Encyclopedia, Horsham,

19 August 2019, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Piracy/> (accessed on 06.10.2025).

⁸ Royal Museum Greenwich, *The 'golden age' of piracy*, Greenwich, <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/golden-age-piracy> (accessed on 08.10.2025).

⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Transnational Organized Crime*, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/transnational-organized-crime> (accessed on 09.10.2025).

¹⁰ Panos Sphoulis, *Banditry in the Medieval Balkans, 800–1500*, Springer Nature Link, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2020.

¹¹ Romanian Criminal Code, Art. 233, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/302157> (accessed on 09.10.2025).

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Natura războiului versus caracterul războiului în epoca tehnologică: continuitate și discontinuitate în arta conflictului modern

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse the conceptual distinction between the nature and character of war as defined by Carl von Clausewitz and reinterpreted in the context of contemporary technological and informational transformations. While the nature of war, as a political and human act, remains constant, its character undergoes significant transformations under the impact of technological progress.

This article explores how the evolution of artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, robotics, and global communication reshapes strategy, perception, and the ethics of warfare, without altering its essence – that of a confrontation between political wills.

Through a historical, theoretical, and analytical approach, it demonstrates that, despite rapid modernisation, the nature of conflict remains unchanged, while the character of war becomes increasingly complex, incorporating psychological, informational, social, economical and cyber dimensions.

Keywords: war, nature, character, technology, strategy, Clausewitz, military revolution

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1. Introducere

Războiul, ca fenomen social și politic, reprezintă una dintre constantele civilizației umane.¹ Din Antichitate până în era digitală, acesta a rămas expresia superlativă a conflictului de voință dintre actori colectivi – triburi, state, alianțe sau structuri ideologice. Deși formele sale de manifestare au variat în funcție de epocă, resurse și tehnologie, esența războiului a continuat să reflecte dinamica dintre rațiune și violență, dintre ordine și haos. Așa cum sublinia Carl von Clausewitz, războiul nu este un fenomen izolat, ci o prelungire a politicii prin alte mijloace, un act de forță menit să impu-

nă voința politică a unei părți asupra celeilalte părți².

În epoca modernă, în special după Revoluția Industrială, schimbările tehnologice au accelerat transformarea modului în care războaiele au fost concepute și purtate. Totuși, în pofida noilor arme, doctrine și tehnici, motivația fundamentală a conflictului – impunerea voinței politice – a rămas neschimbată, în linie cu perspectiva clausewitziană.³ În esență, această continuitate, în paralel cu variabilitatea formelor, marchează deosebirea conceptuală dintre natura războiului și caracterul războiului.

În prezent, odată cu ascensiunea tehnologiilor emergente, inteligenței artificiale și

a spațiului informațional global, înțelegerea acestei distincții devine mai importantă ca oricând. Războiul modern nu se mai limitează la confruntări armate tradiționale, ci include domenii cibernetice, cognitive, psihologice, sociale și economice.⁴ Într-o lume interdependentă și profund digitalizată, se ridică întrebări legate de limitele umanității într-un conflict tot mai automatizat, dar și de capacitatea instituțiilor internaționale de a menține controlul politic asupra violenței organizate.

Astfel, scopul acestei lucrări este de a analiza diferența dintre natura și caracterul războiului, dintr-o perspectivă multidimensională (teoretică, istorică și tehnologică) și de a evalua implicațiile acestor transformări asupra securității globale și a României, ca stat membru NATO aflat în proximitatea unui conflict major în curs de desfășurare.

Întrebări de cercetare și ipoteze de lucru

Pentru a fundamenta analiza, cercetarea pornește de la câteva întrebări esențiale:

1. În ce măsură natura războiului se menține constantă în contextul progresului tehnologic accelerat și al noilor forme de conflict?

2. Cum influențează tehnologiile emergente și dimensiunea informațional-cognitivă, transformarea caracterului războiului, cu accent pe modul în care NATO și România se adaptează acestor evoluții?

Pe baza acestor întrebări, lucrarea propune următoarele ipoteze de lucru:

- **Ipoteza 1:** Natura războiului rămâne invariabilă ca expresie a confruntării politice, însă caracterul său se modifică sub impactul tehnologiilor emergente și conflictelor informaționale și cibernetice.

- **Ipoteza 2:** Eficiența adaptării NATO și a României la transformările caracterului războiului depinde de integrarea tehnologică, consolidarea rezilienței informaționale și menținerea controlului etic și juridic asupra sistemelor autonome.

Prin verificarea acestor ipoteze, articolul își propune să demonstreze că, deși natura războiului este imuabilă, caracterul său se redefineste permanent sub influența inovației tehnologice și a globalizării.

2. Natura războiului – dimensiunea constantă

Conceptul de „*natură a războiului*” are o semnificație profundă și stabilă în teoria strategică. Pentru Clausewitz, războiul reprezintă o „trinitate” compusă din pasiune, rațiune și hazard, asociate, în mod tipic, cu poporul, guvernul și armata.⁵ Această structură simbolică exprimă faptul că războiul este, înainte de toate, un act social și politic. El nu este un fenomen natural, ci o construcție umană, guvernată de emoții, interese și percepții.

De-a lungul istoriei, această natură constantă s-a manifestat sub forme variate, de la confruntările tribale, la războaiele mondiale. Ceea ce unește toate aceste etape este logica politică a conflictului: dorința unui actor de a-și impune voința asupra altuia. Fie că este vorba despre cucerirea unui teritoriu, apărarea unei identități naționale sau menținerea unei ordini ideologice, războiul exprimă întotdeauna o intenție strategică.⁶

În secolul XXI, chiar și în fața automatizării, această dimensiune umană nu dispăre. Frica, neîncrederea, orgoliul și aspirațiile politice continuă să alimenteze decizia de a recurge la violență organizată. Așa cum observa Colin S. Gray, „războiul este o afacere prea umană pentru a fi vreodată cu adevărat rațională”⁷.

Natura războiului include, totodată, elementul de incertitudine, ceea ce Clausewitz numea „ceața războiului”. Nicio tehnologie nu poate elimina complet hazardul și fricțiunea. Deciziile luate în condiții de presiune și lipsă de informații rămân esențiale, la fel ca în secolele trecute.

De aceea, orice analiză a conflictelor contemporane trebuie să recunoască faptul că, în ciuda progreselor tehnice, războiul continuă să fie un produs al interacțiunii dintre voințe, emoții și interese.

3. Caracterul războiului – dimensiunea variabilă

Dacă natura războiului rămâne constantă, caracterul său se transformă continuu, reflectând adaptarea mijloacelor și metodelor la

contextul istoric, tehnologic și cultural. Caracterul războiului este, așadar, o expresie a epocii în care are loc, un produs al interacțiunii dintre progresul tehnologic, doctrinele militare și mentalitățile politice.

Schimbările fundamentale în caracterul războiului au fost, de regulă, legate de revoluții tehnologice. Trecerea de la armele albe la armele de foc a modificat nu doar tactica, ci și structura socială a armatei, transformând războiul dintr-o activitate de elită într-un efort de masă. Apariția artileriei a impus noi doctrine de manevră și fortificație, iar Revoluția Industrială a adus mecanizarea, standardizarea și producția în serie, schimbând radical logistica și capacitatea de susținere a frontului.

Un exemplu emblematic al transformării caracterului războiului este doctrina germană de Blitzkrieg (războiul fulger), aplicată în primele faze ale celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial. Această strategie combina viteza tancurilor, sprijinul aerian și comunicarea radio pentru a dezorganiza și izola inamicul înainte ca acesta să poată reacționa. Blitzkrieg-ul a demonstrat cum integrarea tehnologiilor disponibile și a doctrinei inovatoare putea schimba complet dinamica unui conflict⁸.

Ulterior, perioada Războiului Rece a adus o altă revoluție conceptuală – războiul nuclear. Caracterul confruntării nu mai depindea de capacitatea de a învinge pe câmpul de luptă, ci de abilitatea de a descuraja adversarul. Astfel, s-a trecut de la o logică a cuceririi, la una a echilibrului strategic. Armele atomice au făcut imposibilă victoria totală, impunând o doctrină a distrugerii mutuale asigurate (MAD – Mutual Assured Destruction), care a redefinit scopul și limitele războiului.

După 1990, odată cu prăbușirea Uniunii Sovietice și ascensiunea globalizării, caracterul războiului a suferit o nouă mutație: de la confruntarea directă între state, la conflicte asimetrice și războaie hibride. Actorii non-statali, grupările teroriste și forțele paramilitare au început să exploateze vulnerabilitățile societăților moderne – rețelele de comunicații, opinia publică, economia globală. Războaiele din Irak, Afganistan și Siria au demonstrat că superioritatea tehnologică nu garantează victoria în fața unui inamic dispersat și adaptabil.

În prezent, caracterul războiului este dominat de interdependența între domenii: terestru, aerian, maritim, cibernetic și informațional. Armatele moderne operează într-un cadru de multi-domain warfare, unde succesul depinde nu doar de puterea de foc, ci și de viteză, date și coordonare informațională. Capacitatea de a percepe, analiza și acționa mai rapid decât adversarul devine factorul determinant al victoriei.

Totodată, apariția inteligenței artificiale și a sistemelor autonome ridică întrebări fundamentale privind autonomia deciziei militare. Dacă, în trecut, caracterul războiului era modelat de inovații mecanice sau industriale, astăzi acesta este definit de algoritmi și de controlul informației. Această schimbare de paradigmă este una dintre cele mai semnificative din istoria militară – un salt de la forța fizică la puterea cognitivă.

De aceea, înțelegerea caracterului războiului contemporan presupune nu doar analiza tehnologiilor, ci și a implicațiilor lor asupra doctrinei, eticii și controlului politic al violenței. Transformările recente sugerează că viitorul războiului va fi mai puțin despre cucerire, și mai mult despre controlul percepției, informației și timpului decizional.

4. Războiul în epoca tehnologică

Războiul modern a intrat într-o nouă etapă – una dominată de tehnologie, informație și conectivitate globală. Dacă secolul XX a fost marcat de mecanizare, secolul XXI este definit de digitalizare și automatizare. În această nouă paradigmă, puterea militară nu se mai bazează exclusiv pe volum sau pe forță, ci pe capacitatea de a procesa, integra și exploata informația în timp real.

Tehnologiile emergente – inteligența artificială, sistemele autonome, imprimarea 3D, calculatoarele cuantice și armele hipersonice – modifică profund modul în care se concepe și se desfășoară războiul. Aceste inovații nu sunt simple instrumente tactice, ci factori strategici care pot schimba balanța de putere la nivel global. În contextul actual, fiecare dispozitiv conectat, fiecare imagine satelitară sau semnal

emis devine o piesă într-o uriașă rețea informațională militarizată.

Un exemplu elocvent al transformării caracterului războiului îl constituie conflictul din Ucraina, început în 2014 și amplificat dramatic după 2022. Acest război a demonstrat că superioritatea tehnologică și adaptabilitatea informațională pot decide soarta bătăliilor. Dronele, sateliții comerciali, sistemele de bruiaj și aplicațiile de cartografiere digitală au devenit instrumente strategice. Civili contribuie involuntar la culegerea de informații, prin smartphone-uri și rețele sociale, transformând mediul urban într-un câmp de luptă extins.

Utilizarea dronelor de atac și recunoaștere a schimbat complet dinamica confruntărilor tactice. Modelele accesibile precum Bayraktar TB2 sau Shahed-136 au demonstrat că echilibrul tehnologic poate fi răsturnat chiar și de către actori cu resurse limitate. Acestea au permis forțelor ucrainene să lovească ținte precise, să monitorizeze mișcările trupelor inamice și să compenseze lipsa unei aviații moderne⁹. În același timp, Rusia a răspuns prin dezvoltarea propriilor capacități de bruiaj, război electronic și atacuri cibernetice coordonate, marcând începutul unei competiții între algoritmi și contraalgoritmi.

În paralel, războiul informațional a devenit la fel de important ca cel cinetic. În Ucraina, controlul narațiunilor și gestionarea percepției publice internaționale s-au dovedit decisive. Comunicarea strategică a Kievului, bazată pe transparență și utilizarea rețelelor sociale, a generat o mobilizare globală fără precedent. Astfel, frontul informațional a devenit un multiplicator de forță politică și morală.

Tehnologia a transformat, de asemenea, logistica și comanda. Sistemele bazate pe inteligență artificială pot anticipa nevoile de aprovizionare, pot identifica vulnerabilități și recomanda decizii tactice. De exemplu, analiza "big data" oferă posibilitatea de a estima mișcările trupelor inamice, iar recunoașterea facială aplicată prizonierilor sau soldaților căzuți pe câmpul de luptă oferă un nou nivel de control psihologic și informațional. Totodată, apariția armelor hipersonice – capabile să lovească cu precizie la viteze de peste Mach 5 – redefineste noțiunea de timp de reacție strategic.

În această nouă eră, războiul nu mai este doar o confruntare de forțe, ci o competiție de rețele. Câștigătorul este cel care reușește să vadă mai repede, să proceseze mai clar și să acționeze mai rapid. Acest concept, cunoscut în literatura strategică drept "decision dominance", exprimă o transformare profundă a caracterului războiului: de la distrugerea fizică a inamicului la dominația cognitivă asupra acestuia.

Pe de altă parte, creșterea gradului de automatizare ridică dileme morale și juridice serioase. Cine este responsabil pentru o decizie letală luată de un algoritm? Poate fi un sistem autonom tras la răspundere? Lipsa unei reglementări internaționale privind utilizarea armelor bazate pe inteligență artificială creează un vid periculos. În absența unui control etic și politic, riscul ca războiul să devină un proces dezumanizat crește semnificativ.

Astfel, războiul în epoca tehnologică reprezintă o dublă provocare: pe de o parte, o oportunitate de eficiență și protecție a forțelor proprii; pe de altă parte, o amenințare la adresa echilibrului moral și juridic internațional. În spatele fiecărui sistem automatizat rămâne, inevitabil, decizia umană – dovadă că natura războiului, în esență sa politică și psihologică, continuă să fie imuabilă.

5. Războiul informațional și dimensiunea psihologică

Războiul informațional nu mai este un fenomen periferic al conflictelor, ci unul central. În lumea interconectată a secolului XXI, câmpul de luptă s-a extins dincolo de spațiul fizic, în mintea și conștiința oamenilor. Controlul informației, al narațiunilor și al percepției publice a devenit o armă strategică la fel de puternică precum tancurile sau rachetele.

Conceptul de război informațional se referă la ansamblul acțiunilor menite să influențeze deciziile adversarului, să manipuleze opinia publică și să submineze încrederea în instituții. Aceste operațiuni combină propaganda, dezinformarea, atacurile cibernetice, manipularea mediatică și exploatarea rețelelor sociale. Scopul nu este doar de a deforma realitatea, ci de

a remodela percepția asupra realității, aceasta fiind o diferență subtilă, dar esențială.

În trecut, războiul psihologic era folosit pentru demoralizarea trupelor sau pentru influențarea populației civile. Astăzi, el a devenit omniprezent și invizibil. Actorii statali și non-statali folosesc algoritmi, inteligență artificială și microtargetare pentru a personaliza mesajele și a influența comportamentele. Platformele digitale permit amplificarea mesajelor false, crearea de realități alternative și controlul fluxului de informație la scară globală.

Exemplele recente confirmă această tendință. În timpul conflictului din Ucraina, ambele părți au desfășurat campanii informaționale masive. Rusia a folosit dezinformarea pentru a justifica invazia și a submina sprijinul internațional pentru Kiev, în timp ce Ucraina a folosit comunicarea strategică și transparența digitală pentru a mobiliza opinia publică globală. Imaginile, videoclipurile și mesajele postate de civili sau soldați pe rețele sociale au devenit instrumente de propagandă și, simultan, de rezistență.

Acest tip de conflict, în care informația devine armă, este adesea descris în literatura militară contemporană drept „război cognitiv” (cognitive warfare). El nu vizează distrugerea fizică a inamicului, ci cucerirea spațiului mental al acestuia. Prin manipularea emoțiilor, inducerea fricii sau confuziei și erodarea încrederii în sursele oficiale, se urmărește dezintegrarea coeziunii sociale și a capacității de reacție colectivă.

Inteligența artificială joacă un rol tot mai important în acest proces. Algoritmii de recunoaștere a tiparelor pot anticipa reacțiile emoționale ale indivizilor și pot genera mesaje personalizate pentru a amplifica polarizarea. Astfel, granița dintre operațiunile militare și cele psihologice dispare, iar câmpul de luptă se mută în spațiul informațional global.

Războiul informațional este, totodată, un test al democrațiilor. Societățile deschise sunt mai vulnerabile la manipulare, tocmai pentru că libertatea de exprimare și pluralitatea surselor pot fi exploatare. În acest sens, protejarea securității informaționale devine o componentă fundamentală a apărării naționale. Educația mediatică, alfabetizarea digitală și dezvoltarea rezilienței psihologice a populației sunt la fel

de importante ca investițiile în echipamente militare.

Un alt aspect esențial îl reprezintă rolul emoțiilor. În epoca subiectivității radicale, oamenii nu reacționează predominant la fapte, ci la stimuli emoționali. Propaganda modernă mizează pe frică, furie și identitate. De aceea, succesul războiului informațional nu se măsoară prin numărul de minciuni propagate, ci prin gradul de neîncredere pe care îl produce.

În concluzie, dimensiunea psihologică a războiului contemporan transformă individul din observator în participant. Fiecare utilizator de internet devine, conștient sau nu, un actor în confruntarea informațională globală. Iar în acest context, victima cea mai vulnerabilă este însăși percepția adevărului.

6. Adaptarea doctrinară NATO și implicațiile pentru România

Transformările din mediul strategic actual au determinat o adaptare profundă a doctrinei NATO, care își redefineste rolul, prioritățile și instrumentele de acțiune în fața unei lumi tot mai imprevizibile. Dacă în perioada Războiului Rece, Alianța s-a bazat pe descurajarea convențională și nucleară, astăzi accentul s-a mutat către reziliență, interoperabilitate și superioritate informațională.

Conceptul Strategic al NATO, adoptat la Madrid în 2022, recunoaște explicit că „tehnologiile emergente și disruptive” – inteligența artificială, sistemele autonome, analiza datelor masive și capabilitățile hipersonice – vor remodela fundamental mediul de securitate.¹⁰ În fața acestor provocări, NATO urmărește nu doar adaptarea doctrinară, ci și menținerea unității politice și tehnologice între aliați. Noile concepte precum Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) și NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept definesc un model de acțiune integrat, în care toate mediile de luptă – terestru, aerian, maritim, cibernetic și spațial – sunt coordonate într-un sistem coerent.

Această doctrină marchează o schimbare de paradigmă. Dacă în trecut războaiele erau segmentate pe domenii distincte, astăzi frontul este fluid și multidimensional. Succesul

depinde de sincronizarea informațională și de capacitatea de reacție rapidă. În acest context, se acordă o importanță crescută dezvoltării infrastructurii de comandă și control, capabilă să integreze date în timp real și să asigure decizii rapide la nivel strategic.

Pentru România, adaptarea la această nouă doctrină reprezintă o provocare strategică majoră. Poziționată la frontiera estică a Alianței și având o expunere directă la zona Mării Negre, România are un rol-cheie în arhitectura de securitate euroatlantică. Agresiunea Rusiei asupra Ucrainei a confirmat relevanța strategică a Flancului Estic și a determinat intensificarea cooperării regionale.

România a făcut pași importanți în modernizarea forțelor sale armate și în integrarea în structurile NATO. Achizițiile de sisteme Patriot, HIMARS, transportoare blindate Piranha, aeronave F-16 și, pe termen mediu, aeronave de generația a V-a (F-35), reprezintă nu doar investiții în capacitate, ci și în interoperabilitate. Aceste programe contribuie la integrarea României în rețeaua operațională aliată și la creșterea capacității sale de apărare credibilă.

În paralel, România participă activ la dezvoltarea conceptului NATO de apărare cibernetică și reziliență informațională. Prin Centrul Național Cyberint și implicarea în inițiativele de partajare a datelor de securitate, statul român contribuie la consolidarea Flancului Estic nu doar prin mijloace militare tradiționale, ci și prin apărarea digitală. În acest sens, securitatea nu mai este percepută exclusiv prin prisma tehnicii de luptă și a trupelor, ci și a protecției rețelelor și a fluxurilor informaționale.

Un alt aspect crucial îl reprezintă dezvoltarea resursei umane. Adaptarea doctrinară nu poate fi realizată fără o transformare culturală și educațională profundă. Armata României și instituțiile academice din domeniul apărării investesc tot mai mult în educația strategică, formarea militarilor în domeniul noilor tehnologii și în parteneriate cu industria de apărare.

Pe plan internațional, România s-a aliniat inițiativelor europene de consolidare a rezilienței, precum Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) și European Defence Fund (EDF), reușind să îmbine calitatea de membru NATO cu cea de actor activ în politica de

securitate a Uniunii Europene. Această dublă apartenență oferă avantaje semnificative, dar și responsabilități sporite în privința modernizării capabilităților.

În același timp, provocarea rămâne asigurarea unei culturi a anticipării strategice, în locul unei culturi a reacției. Adevărata adaptare nu înseamnă doar achiziții de echipamente tehnologice, ci și capacitatea de a înțelege și anticipa schimbările de paradigmă. România are potențialul de a deveni un hub regional de analiză strategică și securitate cibernetică, dacă va reuși să combine expertiza militară cu inovația civilă și colaborarea internațională.

Astfel, adaptarea doctrinară NATO și contribuția României la aceasta reprezintă nu doar o necesitate militară, ci o investiție în viitorul ordinii internaționale bazate pe reguli. Într-o lume în care războiul devine tot mai mult o competiție a informației și a tehnologiei, statele capabile să anticipeze și să inoveze vor fi cele care își vor asigura securitatea pe termen lung.

Concluzii

Pe măsură ce tehnologia avansează și automatizarea pătrunde în toate domeniile vieții, războiul devine din ce în ce mai dependent de mașini, algoritmi și sisteme inteligente. În mod paradoxal, această evoluție – deși promite precizie, eficiență și reducerea pierderilor umane – aduce cu sine dileme morale și existențiale fără precedent. Cine deține responsabilitatea pentru o decizie letală luată de un sistem cu inteligență artificială? Poate fi înlocuit discernământul uman cu o logică algoritmică, chiar și într-un context de război just?

Războiul automatizat ridică întrebări profunde despre esența umanității în conflict. Dacă, în trecut, eroismul și sacrificiul reprezentau valori fundamentale, astăzi războiul riscă să devină o competiție rece între sisteme autonome. Prin eliminarea factorului uman din procesul decizional, există riscul dezumanizării totale a conflictului. O dronă care lovește o țintă nu simte teamă, compasiune sau remușcare; acțiunile ei sunt rezultatul unui calcul, nu al unei judecăți morale.

Specialiștii militari preocupați de etica acțiunilor de luptă subliniază că un astfel de model

poate conduce la o eroziune a responsabilității morale. Într-un sistem complet automatizat, lanțul decizional devine difuz: programatorul, operatorul, comandantul și algoritmul împart o vină colectivă, dar niciunul nu deține întreaga responsabilitate.¹¹ Aceasta creează un vid moral periculos, în care războiul riscă să devină o simplă operațiune tehnologică, deconectată de la principiile dreptului internațional și ale eticii războiului just.

Pe de altă parte, nu trebuie ignorate avantajele pe care automatizarea le aduce. Inteligența artificială poate reduce pierderile umane, poate preveni greșelile cauzate de stres și poate gestiona volume uriașe de date imposibil de analizat de către oameni. Problema nu este, așadar, tehnologia în sine, ci modul în care aceasta este integrată într-un cadru etic și juridic adecvat.¹²

În acest sens, multe organizații internaționale – inclusiv ONU și NATO – pledează pentru menținerea „controlului uman semnificativ” asupra sistemelor de arme autonome. Acest concept presupune că decizia finală de a aplica forța letală trebuie să aparțină întotdeauna unui om, nu unei mașini. Doar astfel se poate păstra legătura dintre acțiune militară și responsabilitate morală.

Pentru România și pentru celelalte state membre NATO, provocarea viitorului nu va fi doar adaptarea tehnologică, ci și conservarea umanității în mijlocul acestei revoluții. Formarea ofițerilor și liderilor militari trebuie să includă nu doar competențe tehnice, ci și reflecție etică profundă. Într-o lume dominată de algoritmi, discernământul uman devine cea mai rară și valoroasă resursă strategică.

Războiul viitorului, oricât de sofisticat ar fi, nu poate fi complet autonom. El va rămâne o manifestare a conflictului dintre voințe politice și, în ultimă instanță, dintre conștiințe umane. Acesta nu trebuie privit ca o competiție între mașini, ci ca un test al umanității în fața propriei creații tehnologice. Așa cum natura războiului nu s-a schimbat de la Clausewitz

încă, tot astfel nici responsabilitatea morală nu poate fi delegată unei mașini.

În concluzie, epoca tehnologică nu marchează sfârșitul umanității în război, ci începutul unei noi forme de conștientizare. Într-o lume în care algoritmi pot decide viața și moartea, adevărata victorie va aparține celor care reușesc să păstreze echilibrul între rațiune, etică și umanitate. Numai astfel, războiul viitorului va putea fi nu doar eficient, ci și just.

Note

¹ Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: A History*, Penguin Books, London, 2018, p. 210-290.

² Carl von Clausewitz, *Despre război*, Editura Militară, București, 1982, cap. 1-2, p. 53-60.

³ *Ibidem*, Carte I, cap. 6, p. 7580.

⁴ Lawrence Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 210-290.

⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *op. cit.*, cap. 1-2, p. 67-69.

⁶ Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 45-90.

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *op. cit.*, cap. 1-2, p. 75-80.

⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W.W. Norton & Company, New-York – London, 2001, p. 55-150.

⁹ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster, 1994, cap. 1-3, p. 1-100.

<https://euroclassworks.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/download-kissingers-diplomacy.pdf> accesat la 14.10.2025.

¹⁰ Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, Introducere și cap. 3, p. 1-90, <https://scispace.com/pdf/the-direction-of-war-contemporary-strategy-in-historical-1iyy67wdlf.pdf> accesat la 27.10.2025.

¹¹ Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, PublicAffairs, 2011, cap. 4-6, p. 80160, https://www.academia.edu/23946693/THE_FUTURE_OF_POWER, site accesat la 7.11.2025.

¹² Alvin și Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, Little Brown & Co, 1993, cap. 2, p. 1550, https://ia800502.us.archive.org/28/items/WarAndAntiWar-Toffler/War-And-Anti-War_-_Toffler.pdf accesat la 9.11.2025.

SECURITATE REGIONALĂ

Strategic Narratives and the Legitimation of Foreign and Security Policy: Hungary 2010-2024

Márton SZÁSZ, PhD

Abstract

This article analyses how strategic narratives function as mechanisms for legitimising foreign and security policy in small and medium-sized states in the absence of formalised Grand Strategies. Building on the conceptual distinction proposed by Silove (2018) between Grand Strategy as a plan, a guiding principle and a behavioural model, the study examines Hungary's positioning between 2010 and 2024 within the Euro-Atlantic framework. The analysis employs a qualitative research design, correlating discursive themes in national security strategies and political discourses with recurring patterns of behaviour in domestic and foreign policy. The results indicate a gradual shift from a security logic primarily based on institutional integration (2004), to one placing increasing emphasis on sovereignty, national interest and strategic autonomy (2020). Although Hungary does not have a formally codified general strategy, the convergence between recurring narratives and behavioural patterns suggest the existence of a form of strategic coherence identifiable at the level of principles and behaviour. The study argues that strategic narratives function as mechanisms for coordinating and justifying action, contributing to the articulation of foreign policy options in conditions of asymmetric dependence on alliances.

Keywords: Grand Strategy, strategic narratives, Hungary, sovereignty, strategic autonomy, small and medium-sized states

Márton Szász is a PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of Sociology at the University of Bucharest. His current research explores the intersection between political sociology and security studies, with a particular focus on the evolution of Grand Strategies and strategic narratives in Central and Eastern Europe. His work examines how illiberal governance and sovereignist discourses are reshaping the legitimation of foreign policy in small and medium-sized states, particularly in the case of Hungary. Methodologically, he specialises in qualitative discourse analysis and the systematic examination of political texts, focusing on the alignment between ideological frameworks and institutional behavioural patterns.

1. Introduction

Recent transformations in the European security environment have highlighted not only the persistence of external threats, but also the growing relevance of internal strategic divergences among member states of the European Union and NATO. In this context, the literature increasingly examines how small and medium-sized states articulate and legitimise foreign and security policies in the absence of formally codified Grand Strategies. Rather than relying exclusively on long-term planning documents, these states may display forms of

strategic coherence through the combination of guiding principles, recurring behavioural patterns and strategic narratives (Silove, 2018, pp. 4, 18; Thorhallsson, 2018, p. 20; Brommesson et al., 2025, pp. 2, 9).

Although Grand Strategy has traditionally been associated with great powers capable of integrating long-term objectives into coherent frameworks of action, recent research suggests that smaller states can also develop identifiable strategic orientations. In such contexts, political discourse and strategic narratives function as mechanisms linking stated principles to foreign policy behaviour (Miskimmon et al.,

2013, pp. 2-5, 7; Roselle et al., 2014, pp. 74-75; Krebs & Jackson, 2007, pp. 4, 16). However, the relationship between discursive patterns and behavioural coherence is rarely operationalised in a systematic manner that would allow for the identification of a form of Grand Strategy in the absence of formal documents.

This article addresses this gap by analysing Hungary as a small-to-medium-sized state, whose foreign and security policy in the period 2010–2024 has generated recurring tensions within the European Union and NATO. Existing studies emphasise both domestic political transformations and shifts in foreign policy discourse, often associated with illiberal tendencies and sovereignist orientations (Enyedi, 2016, p. 14; Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, p. 43; Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021, p. 682; Sadecki, 2014, p. 33). Rather than treating these developments as fragmented or reactive, the analysis examines whether they reflect a coherent set of guiding principles that can be interpreted in strategic terms.

Conceptually, the study draws on Silove's (2018) distinction between strategy as plan, guiding principle and behavioural model, and integrates it with the strategic narratives approach, understood as a mechanism for structuring and legitimising action in international politics (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 7; Agastia, 2023, p. 5). This framework enables the joint analysis of ideational and behavioural dimensions of foreign policy.

The central argument is that, although Hungary does not possess a formally codified Grand Strategy, its foreign and security policy since 2010 exhibits a recognisable form of strategic coherence when analysed through the alignment of recurring discursive themes and repeated behavioural patterns. Empirically, the study identifies such themes in official documents and political speeches and correlates them with consistent patterns of behaviour within the European Union and NATO, including selective alignment and the differentiated use of institutional instruments within alliances, patterns also observed in contexts of asymmetric strategic dependence (Studemeyer, 2018, pp. 2, 6; Gricius & Fakhoury, 2024, pp. 2, 4).

By systematically correlating discourse and behaviour, the article contributes to

the broader debate on how small and medium-sized states generate and sustain strategic coherence in the absence of formal strategy documents, while providing an analytical framework that integrates the ideational and behavioural dimensions of foreign policy.

2. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

2.1. Grand Strategy beyond Formal Planning: An Operational Perspective

The concept of grand strategy is commonly used to describe how states align political objectives with available resources in order to achieve long-term goals. In classical approaches, it is understood as the coherent integration of political, military and economic instruments, typically associated with great powers capable of sustaining such efforts over time (Brands, 2014, pp. 3, 7; Dueck, 2006, pp. 9-11, 147-152). This perspective prioritises formally articulated and institutionalised strategies, thereby marginalising cases in which strategic coherence emerges implicitly through practice, particularly in the case of small and medium-sized states often treated as reactive actors constrained by external factors (Thorhallsson, 2018, pp. 22-23). To address this limitation, the article adopts Silove's (2018) distinction between three meanings of Grand Strategy: as a deliberate plan, as a set of guiding principles, and as a model of observable behaviour. This allows for the identification of strategic coherence in the absence of formal strategic documents. Accordingly, general strategy is understood here as the alignment between recurring guiding principles identifiable in political discourse and consistent patterns of behaviour observable in foreign and security policy.

Operationally, guiding principles are identified through recurring themes in official documents and political discourse, while behavioural patterns are traced through repeated positions and actions within the European Union and NATO. Strategic coherence is identified when these elements exhibit a relatively stable alignment over time (Silove, 2018,

pp. 12, 14, 18). This perspective is particularly relevant for small and medium-sized states, where political discourse and strategic communication play a central role in articulating and legitimising foreign policy choices under conditions of limited resources and alliance dependence (Brommesson et al., 2025, pp. 2, 9; Gricius & Fakhoury, 2024, pp. 2, 4).

2.2. Strategic Narratives as Mechanisms of Legitimation

Strategic narratives are understood as structured representations through which political elites interpret the international environment and legitimise foreign policy choices, thereby contributing to the definition of state interests and roles (Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp. 2, 7; Roselle et al., 2014, pp. 71, 74; Agastia, 2023, pp. 2-3). Analytically, these narratives are articulated through four core components: actors, setting, conflict and proposed resolution, and they actively participate in constructing strategic reality by organising interpretations of the external environment (Agastia, 2023, pp. 286-287). Rather than being treated as rhetorical devices, they are analysed as mechanisms linking identity, objectives and behaviour, contributing to the coordination of political action (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 2; Roselle et al., 2014, pp. 71-74; Miskimmon et al., 2017, pp. 1-6, 23, 165).

Operationally, strategic narratives are identified through the recurrence of interpretative frameworks and justificatory arguments in official discourse. They fulfil both internal functions, by rendering political choices intelligible to domestic audiences, and external functions, by communicating intentions and priorities to allies and adversaries (Krebs & Jackson, 2007, pp. 6, 16; Agastia, 2023, pp. 286-289). Existing research shows that such narratives are particularly salient in situations where formal commitments diverge from actual behaviour, serving to legitimise policies that may be domestically costly or controversial (Coticchia & De Simone, 2016, p. 25; Sjöstedt & Noreen, 2021, p. 321). Their effectiveness, however, depends on their congruence with observable behaviour, as persistent discrepancies can undermine credibility and affect both domestic

legitimacy and alliance cohesion (Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp. 5, 8).

2.3. Analytical Integration

By combining a behavioural understanding of general strategy with the concept of strategic narratives, the analytical framework enables the identification of strategic coherence in the absence of formal planning documents. It integrates the ideational and behavioural dimensions of foreign policy and focuses on the correlation between recurring discursive themes and repeated behavioural patterns, allowing for the reconstruction of strategic orientation as it emerges from practice, rather than from formal doctrine (Silove, 2018, pp. 14, 18; Miskimmon et al., 2017, pp. 1-6, 23).

3. Methodology and Data

This article adopts a qualitative research design that combines discourse analysis with the examination of observable behaviour in domestic and foreign policy. The objective is to identify forms of strategic coherence in the absence of a formally articulated overarching strategy, by correlating recurring discursive themes with repeated behavioural patterns (Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp. 6-7; Silove, 2018, pp. 3, 8).

The unit of analysis is the state, operationalised through official discourse and political behaviour. The analysis covers the period 2010–2024, defined by the continuity of executive leadership and the availability of comparable strategic and discursive sources. The year 2010 marks the consolidation of a new governing majority, while 2024 represents the most recent point for which a coherent corpus of official documents and speeches is available. Developments following the most recent electoral cycle are not included and may affect the evolution of the narratives identified. The case is selected due to the continuity of executive leadership and the consolidation of a distinct foreign policy discourse (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, pp. 39-40, 42; Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021, pp. 687-688, 690).

The empirical corpus consists of official primary sources, including Hungary's national security strategies from 2004, 2012 and 2020 (Government of Hungary, 2004, 2012, 2020), legislative documents shaping the political-institutional framework (Government of Hungary, 2010, 2013, 2021, 2023a, 2023b), and political speeches by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, particularly those delivered at the Tüskekert Summer University (Orbán, 2017, 2019, 2022, 2024). These sources are selected for their institutional authority and their role in articulating foreign and security policy positions. Although the analysis covers the period 2010–2024, the 2004 strategy is included as a baseline for identifying subsequent discursive shifts. All translations from Hungarian sources are by the author, unless otherwise stated.

The analysis proceeds by identifying recurring themes in official discourse, such as sovereignty, national identity, strategic autonomy and interpretations of alliance commitments, and correlating them with observable patterns of behaviour within the European Union and NATO. A theme is considered recurring when it appears systematically across multiple documents and discourses over time. Behavioural patterns are identified through documented positions and actions, interpreted in conjunction with official discourse and supported by primary sources and specialist literature (Sadlecki, 2014, pp. 41–42; Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021, pp. 683, 685).

Operationally, the relationship between strategic narratives and external behaviour is examined in two steps. First, narratives are identified through the recurrence of stable interpretative frameworks, operationalised by references to actors, threats, interests and strategic solutions. Second, these narratives are correlated with observable behavioural patterns, such as positions within the European Union and NATO or foreign policy initiatives. Strategic coherence is identified when patterns of behaviour are consistently justified by the same recurring narrative frameworks.

The analysis does not assume a deterministic relationship between discourse and behaviour, but rather identifies patterns of interpretative congruence. In this sense, narratives are treated as frameworks of justification and orientation that increase the likelihood and

consistency of certain political choices over time, without directly determining them.

4. Case Study: Hungary

4.1. Discursive Reorientation from 2010 to 2024

Since 2010, Hungary's foreign and security policy discourse has undergone a gradual shift, reflected in both official strategic documents and the executive's political speeches. In this article, security strategies are treated not only as planning instruments, but also as expressions of institutionalised discourse, relevant for identifying recurring themes.

The 2004 strategy defines security in terms closely linked to Euro-Atlantic integration, emphasising that "Hungary's security situation is stable; the basic guarantee of its security is the cooperation taking place within the framework of NATO and the EU" and that "Hungary is primarily providing for its security within the framework of membership of NATO and the European Union" (Government of Hungary, 2004, Chapter I, point 1). Security is thus conceptualised primarily through alliance-based guarantees and institutional cooperation.

The 2012 strategy reflects an intermediate position, in which NATO and EU membership continue to define the institutional framework of security policy, while greater emphasis is placed on internal responsibility, requiring "a whole-of-government approach [...] and the allocation of adequate resources" (Government of Hungary, 2012, point 5; para 51). Rather than indicating a shift away from alliance-based security, this reorientation suggests an increased emphasis on the development and mobilisation of domestic capacities within the existing alliance framework. In this sense, security is articulated not as externalised in opposition to domestic capacity, but as combining external guarantees with internal preparedness.

By contrast, the 2020 strategy articulates security explicitly in terms of national interest and sovereignty, stating that responses to security challenges are based "in all cases on Hungary and the Hungarian nation" and rejecting

“efforts that prescribe the compulsory resettlement of stateless persons or foreign nationals” (Government of Hungary, 2020, para 5; para 30). Security is thus internalised and directly linked to political control and population governance.

Taken together, these documents indicate a transition from a logic of integration and institutional dependence to one that combines alliance membership with increasing emphasis on sovereignty and state responsibility. This reorientation is further articulated in Viktor Orbán’s speeches.

In 2017, the emphasis is placed on regaining sovereignty and conditioning European integration on national control, with Orbán stating that “once we have regained our sovereignty, we should reform” the European Union (Orbán, 2017, para 36). In 2019, this position is extended through a critique of the liberal model and the definition of the nation as a “historically and culturally defined community”, associated with “Christian freedom”, indicating a shift towards an explicitly ideological framing (Orbán, 2019, para 31).

In 2022, the interpretative framework expands in response to geopolitical change, with Orbán calling for simultaneous agreements with multiple global actors, “with the Russians [...] with the Chinese [...] and with the United States as well”, signalling a diversification of external relations based on strategic utility (Orbán, 2022, para 54). In 2024, this logic is explicitly formulated in strategic terms through the concept of “connectivity”, defined as avoiding being “locked [...] in none of them” between competing economic blocs (Orbán, 2024, para 63).

Overall, these developments point to a cumulative shift from a discourse centred on integration towards one structured around sovereignty, strategic autonomy and pragmatic flexibility. This transformation does not take the form of an abrupt rupture, but of a gradual consolidation of recurring themes over time.

4.2. Strategic Narratives and the Legitimisation of Foreign Policy Behaviour

Discourse analysis indicates the presence of recurring strategic narratives that structure

both the interpretation of the international environment and the justification of foreign policy behaviour.

A first narrative can be described as “sovereign realism”, articulated through the opposition between external models of political organisation and national specificity. In his 2017 speech, Orbán rejects the idea of “complete assimilation” to the Western model and argues for the need to follow a distinct path adapted to the regional context, implying that alignment is conditional upon compatibility with the national interest.

A second narrative is that of strategic pragmatism. In the 2022 speech, systemic transformations are linked to the need for flexible adaptation of foreign policy, with Orbán arguing that “a new agreement must be concluded with the Russians... Hungary must conclude a new agreement with the Chinese”, indicating a strategy of diversifying external relations in line with economic and strategic opportunities (Orbán, 2022). The same speech extends this logic to conflict management, where it is argued that “peace is the only solution... it is also the sole antidote to war-induced inflation and the economic crisis caused by war”, suggesting a cost-based, rather than ideological approach to foreign policy.

A third narrative concerns national identity and historical continuity, reflected both discursively and institutionally. The 2018 constitutional amendment states that “the protection of Hungary’s constitutional self-identity [...] is the duty of every organ of the state”, institutionalising constitutional identity as a fundamental obligation (Government of Hungary, 2018, Art. 2). This is reinforced by the 2023 amendment, which introduces mechanisms aimed at investigating foreign interference, through a body “tasked with investigating foreign interference [...]”, consolidating the link between identity, sovereignty and political security (Government of Hungary, 2023b, Art. 3).

Taken together, these narratives function as mechanisms of legitimisation that reduce the tension between formal alliance membership and differentiated external behaviour, being systematically linked to concrete political and institutional practices (Agastia, 2023, pp. 284, 287; Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp. 2, 7).

At the same time, this external positioning is accompanied internally by a reconfiguration of the civic and democratic space, which has been subject to sustained criticism from international observers (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

4.3. Strategic Behaviour and Patterns of Coherence

Hungary's external behaviour displays recurring patterns that can be correlated with the strategic narratives identified earlier, particularly those centred on sovereignty, pragmatism and constitutional identity. Rather than treating these behaviours as ad hoc responses to external constraints, the analysis interprets them as expressions of relatively stable narrative frameworks. The recurrent use of institutional blocking mechanisms, for instance, can be understood as a strategy aimed at maximising decision-making autonomy, a pattern also identified in the literature on member state behaviour under conditions of institutional interdependence (Ovádek, n.d.; Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021, pp. 683-685). At the same time, foreign policy initiatives, such as the Paks II project or the blocking of financial support for Ukraine, presuppose a degree of domestic political insulation, supported by control over media narratives and institutional mechanisms targeting "foreign influence".

A first pattern concerns the strategic use of institutional mechanisms within the European Union to maximise autonomy. This is illustrated by the repeated blocking of consensus in key decisions. In November 2020, Hungary, together with Poland, blocked the adoption of the 2021–2027 EU budget and the NextGenerationEU instrument, challenging the rule of law conditionality mechanism (Fella, 2020, pp. 1-2). In December 2022, Budapest blocked an €18 billion macro-financial aid package for Ukraine (POLITICO, 2022, paras 1-2), and in December 2023 it prevented the adoption of a €50 billion support package within the European Council (POLITICO, 2023, paras 1-2). These episodes indicate the systematic use of veto and consensus-blocking as instruments of political negotiation, a pattern consistent with

empirical data on veto practices in EU decision-making (Ovádek, n.d.).

A second pattern is selective alignment in foreign and security policy, reflected in the maintenance of strategic relations with non-Western actors alongside formal Euro-Atlantic commitments. A relevant example is the 2014 agreement with the Russian Federation on the expansion of the Paks nuclear power plant (Government of Hungary, 2014, Art. 1), frequently interpreted as an indicator of pragmatic foreign policy orientation (Sadecki, 2014, p. 42). In political discourse, such cooperation is justified through references to energy security and national economic interests in a context of systemic uncertainty (Orbán, 2022, para 54). From a theoretical perspective, this configuration can be interpreted as part of an "intellectual architecture" structuring foreign policy priorities around autonomy and resource security (Brands, 2014, pp. 3, 9), while also reflecting the role of ideas and domestic context in shaping strategy (Dueck, 2006, pp. 10, 31).

A third pattern concerns the alignment between discourse and institutionalisation, particularly through constitutional amendments adopted after 2010. These measures can be interpreted as part of a broader process of securitisation of the domestic political sphere, in which "external interference" is framed as a threat to state survival, linking domestic sovereignty to external strategic positioning (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23-25). The 2013 amendment strengthens state control over institutional domains, including restrictions on political advertising and the expansion of central bank oversight (Government of Hungary, 2013, Arts. 3, 5), building on earlier media regulation aimed at ensuring "an accurate picture of events and disputed viewpoints" (Government of Hungary, 2010, Art. 13) and later reinforced through legislation protecting national values (Government of Hungary, 2021, Art. 9, para 1).

The 2018 amendment explicitly constitutionalises sovereignty and identity, defining the protection of constitutional self-identity as a fundamental duty of the state and limiting the scope of EU competences over territory, population and state organisation, while also introducing restrictions on migration

(Government of Hungary, 2018, Arts. 1-2). This trajectory is further developed in 2023 through the institutionalisation of mechanisms aimed at investigating foreign interference, including a body “tasked with investigating foreign interference [...]” and linked to the protection of constitutional identity (Government of Hungary, 2023b, para 1), supported by the Act on the Defence of National Sovereignty (Government of Hungary, 2023a).

Taken together, these developments indicate a shift from the consolidation of internal institutional control towards the explicit articulation and institutional protection of sovereignty. The convergence between discursive frameworks and behavioural patterns suggests the existence of a consistent strategic orientation, in which the use of institutional mechanisms, selective alignment and domestic securitisation are mutually reinforcing. In Silove’s terms, this configuration can be interpreted as a form of Grand Strategy in a behavioural sense, characterised by continuity and adaptability in the absence of formal codification (Silove, 2018, pp. 11, 14-15).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This article has examined how strategic narratives and political discourse function as mechanisms for legitimising foreign and security policy in the absence of a formally articulated overarching strategy. Drawing on Silove’s (2018) distinction between plans, guiding principles and behavioural patterns, the analysis shows that strategic coherence may emerge from the alignment between recurring discursive frameworks and relatively stable patterns of external behaviour, rather than from the existence of a formalised document.

In the case of Hungary, no general strategy can be identified in the classical sense of a fully articulated plan. However, the convergence between strategic documents, executive discourse and repeated political positions indicates the presence of a form of Grand Strategy in a behavioural and principled sense. The persistent emphasis on sovereignty and deci-

sion-making autonomy, observable both in security strategies (Government of Hungary, 2004, 2012, 2020) and in political discourse (Orbán, 2017, 2019, 2022, 2024), combined with differentiated positions within the European Union, supports this interpretation (Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021, pp. 683, 685, 687).

The findings confirm the central role of strategic narratives as mechanisms of legitimisation and coordination, consistent with the specialist literature (Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp. 2, 5; Roselle et al., 2014, pp. 71, 74-75). Narratives contribute to defining the national interest, interpreting external constraints and justifying policy choices that may diverge from dominant alliance expectations, indicating that discourse constitutes a core component of strategic action rather than a secondary element.

While the alignment between recurring narratives and behavioural patterns indicates a degree of strategic coherence, this should not be interpreted as evidence of full structural autonomy. Hungary’s external positioning remains embedded in alliance-based dependencies, suggesting that autonomy functions less as a stable geopolitical condition and more as a continuous bargaining instrument within institutional frameworks. This interpretation is consistent with existing work on small states operating under conditions of asymmetric interdependence, where room for manoeuvre is shaped by structural constraints, rather than eliminated by discursive or strategic coherence (Thorhallsson, 2018, p. 19; Brommesson et al., 2025, pp. 1-2). In this context, Grand Strategy operates through a dual logic, in which internal sovereignty supports an external posture of pragmatic realism and selective alignment, while reducing vulnerability to alliance-based conditionality mechanisms (Keohane, 1969, pp. 296, 298; Silove, 2018, pp. 9, 20).

More broadly, the Hungarian case illustrates a form of strategic positioning that does not fit neatly into conventional categories. States combining formal alliance membership with discursive challenges to dominant norms cannot be classified strictly as conformist or revisionist, complicating the assessment of strategic behaviour and raising questions regarding the management of normative divergence within multilateral frameworks.

The contribution of this study lies in providing an analytical framework for identifying strategic coherence through the systematic correlation of ideational and behavioural dimensions, applicable to other small and medium-sized states in similar contexts (Agastia, 2023, p. 287; Studemeyer, 2018, pp. 2, 8). At the same time, its limitations must be acknowledged: the reliance on public sources restricts access to internal decision-making processes, while the qualitative design does not allow for statistical generalisation. The analysis is further limited to the period 2010–2024 and does not account for potential shifts associated with the most recent electoral cycle, which may affect the evolution of the strategic narratives identified. These limitations, however, open avenues for future comparative research on implicit forms of Grand Strategy and the evolution of strategic narratives under conditions of systemic change.

Hungary's post-2010 trajectory thus suggests a shift in the understanding of Grand Strategy, from a formal doctrine to an emergent configuration shaped by the interaction between narrative and institutional practice.

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Critical Maritime Infrastructure as a Security Concern. Building Resilience in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea

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Abstract

Throughout history, control of the seas has been a reliable indicator of the capacity of various actors, either states, international organisations, or non-state entities, to project power and influence in political, economic or military terms. The question of dominance at sea remains a highly contested topic and directly interconnected with the debates over natural resources, and the pursuit of national interests or regional interests. This article aims to analyse the importance of building resilience in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, in the EU and NATO context, highlighting how the protection of critical maritime infrastructure has become a key security concern amid increasing hybrid threats to the stability of these regions.

Keywords: *Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Resilience, critical maritime infrastructure, EU, NATO*

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1. Introduction

In a multipolar world, maritime security represents a central and recurring theme amid the escalation of interstate conflicts and the emergence of terrorism, migration, illicit activities, technological innovation, and competition for natural resources. Maritime dominance has historically been contested either in terms of economic advantages or political and military power.¹ Therefore, who controls the seas also determines control over natural resources.

This is why, protecting and expanding critical maritime infrastructure has become an ur-

gent necessity within an increasingly complex landscape of conventional and unconventional threats, in which state and non-state actors strategically invest in the proliferation of missile and drone technologies, illicit arms flows, acts of sabotage, and cyberattacks.²

This article analyses the sensitive relationship between threats, critical infrastructure, and resilience in order to highlight a comprehensive and applied perspective on EU and NATO efforts to shape a security paradigm in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea that is adapted to the repertoire of instruments, tactics, and resources used by Russia to destabilise vulnerable institutions and societies. Thus, the

article addresses the following research question: taking into account the increasing threats to the security of the Baltic Sea region and the Black Sea region, what are the main directions of cooperation and collaboration within NATO and the European Union in the domain of protection of critical maritime infrastructure and enhancing resilience in these areas?

The study advances the hypothesis that both national and collective approaches adopted by NATO and EU member states continue to focus predominantly on the management, deescalation, and deterrence of regional tensions in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Within these approaches, the preventive dimension of resilience-building still occupies a relatively marginal position, although significant progress has been achieved in the field of continuous monitoring, early warning mechanisms, and the identification of hybrid threats. At the same time, the spectrum of hybrid threats has expanded considerably in the context of Russian aggression in the region, extending beyond conventional military risks towards cyberattacks, sabotage of energy infrastructure, disinformation campaigns, disruptions of maritime transport corridors, and threats targeting subsea communication and data infrastructure.

From a theoretical perspective, this research is situated within the broader interdisciplinary literature on resilience studies, protection of critical infrastructure, and security governance. More specifically, the article aligns with research paradigms that conceptualise maritime security through a holistic and multidimensional framework, where critical infrastructure resilience is understood not only in military terms, but also through the lens of economic security, energy interdependence, cybersecurity, technological vulnerabilities, and institutional adaptability. In this regard, the study builds upon approaches developed in strategic and security studies emphasising the transition from reactive security models towards preventive and resilience-oriented governance frameworks capable of addressing complex and hybrid threats in increasingly interconnected maritime spaces.

Our research highlights that the current framework of cooperation and collaboration

within NATO and the EU requires further consolidation and integration into common NATO–EU strategic frameworks capable of capitalising on lessons learned, shared intelligence, and best practices based on preventive approaches and the continuous monitoring of hybrid threats. The study argues that the growing strategic interconnectedness between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions necessitates more coordinated mechanisms of institutional resilience, strategic communication, information-sharing, and infrastructure protection among allied and partner states.

The methodological design of the article is based on comparative analysis, document analysis, and secondary data analysis in order to map and examine the sensitive relationship between threats, critical infrastructure, and resilience. The comparative perspective allows the identification of similarities and differences in the strategic approaches adopted across the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions, while the document analysis focuses on NATO, EU, and national strategic documents, policy frameworks, security strategies, and institutional reports related to maritime security and hybrid threats. Secondary data analysis is used to evaluate emerging security trends, regional vulnerabilities, and patterns of institutional adaptation in response to evolving geopolitical risks.

Maritime security constitutes a critical and indispensable component of global security and stability, requiring enhanced coordination and stronger maritime governance to manage and deter complex and interconnected threats.³ The Pact for the Future⁴ seeks to improve cooperation and information-sharing through governance frameworks at the global, regional, subregional, and bilateral levels in order to detect, prevent, deter, and counter threats to maritime security and safety, in full respect of international law.

Geopolitical and security stakes intersect and overlap with technological progress and the integration of satellite communications in regions such as the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, where hybrid and interconnected threats are evident (e.g., the use of “dark vessels” or the shadow fleet to destabilise and conduct illicit activities).⁵ The shockwaves of the illegal and

illegitimate Russia's annexation of Crimea, followed by Russia's war in Ukraine, have compelled a rethinking of regional approaches to deterrence and defence in both the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.⁶

In the Baltic Sea, the decades of peace following the Cold War were associated with intensified political and economic cooperation, coupled with a significant reduction in defence spending and declining capabilities among the Nordic states.⁷ The "strategic pause"⁸ came to an end with Russia's use of military force and destabilising actions, which demonstrated that a tripwire defence posture proved insufficient.⁹ After 2014, Russia diversified and expanded its gray-zone activities, including economic coercion, disinformation and propaganda, cyberattacks, and the use of drones targeting critical maritime and military infrastructure.¹⁰

Already a vital artery for trade and energy¹¹, the Baltic Sea has become—following Finland's accession (2023) and Sweden's accession (2024) to NATO—a sea of more strategic importance for strengthening collective deterrence and defence.¹² The Baltic Sea constitutes a genuine example of a unique case due to the geopolitical position of post-Soviet states with relatively young Western democracies (e.g., Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), which continue to be exposed to heightened vulnerabilities stemming from hostile foreign powers (Russia, China, and Belarus).¹³ States in the region are currently pursuing a significant increase in defence spending, force modernisation, and the acquisition of new equipment.¹⁴ Due to its unique geopolitics—shaped by the dynamics of security within the NATO–EU–Russia equation (through the Kaliningrad exclave) and the enclosed nature of the Baltic Sea (with narrow straits)—the region is considered a key strategic vulnerability in NATO and EU conceptions of security and the resilience of critical infrastructures.¹⁵

For centuries, the Black Sea has been a natural border and battleground between Great Powers, a bridge between Europe and Asia (as an exit or entry point for the Middle Corridor linking Europe with Central Asia (and China) via the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea), a transit corridor, and a strategic zone for the reversal of spheres of influence, as well as for

commercial and cultural exchanges.¹⁶ The Danube and the Black Sea ports represent global hubs for international exchanges, the transport of goods, gas, petroleum products, and energy.¹⁷ This unique geostrategic position is determined both by the intersection of major east–west and north–south corridors and by its location on the edge of the European, Eurasian, and Middle Eastern geographical and geopolitical spaces.¹⁸

The relevance of the Black Sea region is further amplified by its economic growth potential associated with its critical link within the global trade network and by the sustained focus on connectivity, energy networks, industrial capacities, high-technology weapons, and security.¹⁹

As a stage for both military and cyber activities, the Black Sea has regained strategic importance after Russia's war in Ukraine, underlying the need of a renewed security order in this region. Within this context, geopolitical and security paradigms in the Black Sea region have been adapted to new security and insecurity challenges, with critical elements including: (1) the resilience of the Ukrainian armed forces and society; (2) comprehensive economic sanctions; and (3) military and financial support from Western allies aimed at weakening Russia's economy and military capabilities.²⁰

The Black Sea represents a focal point where regional powers and Great Powers meet, with the primary stake being the redefinition of the regional security architecture, carrying implications for Europe and the global level. On the one hand, Russia uses the Black Sea to supply its armed forces in the war against Ukraine. On the other hand, Türkiye emerges as a dominant power.²¹

The Black Sea offers a projection of Russia's status—from a regional hegemonic power to a disruptive power that generates major security risks for all member states. Within this equation, securing the Black Sea region is closely linked to the capacity of the EU and NATO to develop a new strategic vision to manage tensions and conflicts with geostrategic, economic, and connectivity stakes.²² A more comprehensive approach to Black Sea security must

therefore include both soft and hard security elements.²³

In the current geopolitical context, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea do not merely offer a projection of power and spheres of influence among regional powers and Great Powers. The stakes of security and resilience in these two regions are closely linked to a broader debate on respect for international law and the shared values that underpin economic, energy, cultural, and political relations.²⁴

The prospect of renewed aggression from Russia constitutes the common denominator of threats to EU and NATO security.²⁵ In the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the resilience landscape has undergone significant changes. In response to both classical and hybrid threats, NATO and EU efforts focus on protecting critical infrastructures and networks (to manage long-term threats), alongside strengthening preparedness and civil resilience.²⁶

Resilience, as a pillar of modern security, remains a contested and broadly defined concept in the literature, used to capture military, infrastructural, digital, and societal dimensions.²⁷ The notion of resilience needs to be understood in relation to its multidimensional nature, the specificity of risks, and the structures and functions exposed before a shock occurs, during its impact, and after it has materialised.²⁸ In a narrow sense, the concept of resilience highlights the capacity for adaptability, responsiveness, and tenacity in the face of threats and challenges.²⁹ In a broader sense, resilience entails adaptability, control, and the management of different registers of current risks and foreseeable, possible, and even unknown future disruptions in an unstable and unpredictable environment exposed to endogenous or exogenous risks.³⁰

In order to deter and counter increasingly aggressive hybrid threats and challenges posed by state and non-state actors against the Allies, NATO and the EU place the concept of resilience at the core of a 360-degree approach to managing capacities, risks, and vulnerabilities in times of peace, crisis, and conflict. In a broad sense, managing strategic threats against democratic systems, critical infrastructure, and supply chains is closely linked to the capacity

for awareness, detection, preparedness, and planning through a whole-of-government and collective approach, integrating public-private cooperation and societal resilience.³¹

2. Threats in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea

At present, the Baltic Sea region represents a key arena of regional geopolitical dynamics, simultaneously serving as a focal point in the NATO and EU context, as well as a hotspot where Russia and China actively test Western deterrence through underwater sabotage, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and resilience testing.³² As a vital and strategic region for energy supply, transport, and communication, the Baltic Sea constitutes an economic and geopolitical space in which hybrid threats and tactics intersect, targeting institutions, populations, resources, and critical infrastructure.

The U.S. Helsinki Commission³³ identified more than 150 hybrid operations between February 2022 and November 2024 attributed to or suspected of being carried out by Russia and pro-Russian groups to destabilise NATO member states. These operations targeted attacks on critical infrastructure, violence campaigns, weaponised migration, and election and information campaigns. The Baltic Sea region has been affected by cyberattacks (e.g., the large-scale GPS jamming in December 2023 coordinated from the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, which disrupted flights in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, and the Baltic states).³⁴

Cyberattacks have targeted governmental institutions and energy infrastructure. The most common types of attacks include Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, phishing, and the exploitation of software vulnerabilities.³⁵ A landmark moment remains Web War I (April–May 2007), which involved the coordination of cyberattacks against financial and socio-political institutions in Estonia after the country defied Russian threats and removed the Red Army monument from Tallinn.³⁶ Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, pro-Russian hackers (e.g., the Killnet, HakNet Team, and Noname groups) carried

out periodic DDoS attacks in 2022 against government institutions and private sectors in Lithuania and Poland. In Lithuania, the cyberattacks of summer 2022 targeted critical infrastructure, governmental institutions, and the logistics sector.³⁷ In 2025, the Baltic Sea region recorded significant increases in the use of jamming activities through Russian electronic warfare (EW) and electronic intelligence (ELINT) systems.³⁸

Another constantly evolving and increasingly sophisticated pattern is represented by the growing frequency of deliberate sabotage acts, which have particularly targeted NATO's critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. The gas leaks from the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines located off Denmark's Bornholm Island (September 2022) highlighted not only hostile intent and the use of sophisticated approaches, but above all the vulnerability of regional states to threats targeting seabed infrastructure (e.g., pipelines and submarine cables).³⁹

These incidents were followed by the damage of the Balticconnector gas pipeline linking Finland and Estonia (damaged in October 2023 by the vessel Newnew Polar Bear, owned by a Chinese company, with Chinese authorities invoking accidental reasons), and also other acts of sabotage in November 2024, like the severing of the communications cables which caused vulnerability in terms of under-sea communication infrastructure (such as the incidents with the BCS East-West Interlink cable between Lithuania and Sweden and the C-Lion 1 cable connecting Finland to Germany, which occurred at the same time with the presence of a Chinese bulk carrier Yi Peng 3 in the proximity of these cables. Moreover, on 25 December 2024, the Estlink 2 power cable was cut by the oil tanker Eagle S, registered in the Cook Islands, later seized by Finnish authorities to investigate potential acts of sabotage.⁴⁰

Subversive and sabotage actions have also targeted military infrastructure, such as the interference incidents in Germany in 2024, affecting US bases and the German navy, or the takeover of the Bremanger dam in Norway by Russian hackers.⁴¹

The Baltic Sea region has also become a testing ground for "false flag operations" aimed at escalating tensions through the sab-

otage of historically significant events, including the destruction of monuments, cemeteries, and other culturally significant sites. In this regard, one can note the desecration of several national memorial sites in Estonia in 2024 and the attempted arson attack on the Museum of Occupation in Latvia in 2024.⁴²

Maritime and environmental security in the Baltic Sea region is threatened by Russia's use of the so-called "shadow fleet", an activity that increases the risks of chemical munitions leakage into the sea.⁴³ Russia's network of old tankers and uninsured ships has been used to damage critical subsea infrastructure (cables, pipelines, and energy assets), while circumventing Western economic sanctions. The Baltic Sea is exposed to pollution risks, as aging tankers that fail to meet safety regulations may cause (unintentionally or deliberately) environmental disasters.⁴⁴

The war in Ukraine has generated new security and trade dynamics, increasing also the vulnerability of partner countries in this region.⁴⁵ Russia's war against Ukraine has led to the proliferation of naval mines and their deliberate release adrift in the Black Sea, actions that have also resulted in commercial maritime incidents.⁴⁶

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine highlight the Kremlin's geo-economic strategy of projecting power and influence across the wider region. The redrawing of borders through military force simultaneously constitutes an act of contestation of the international order and also a change in the NATO's and the EU's strategic approach of this region.⁴⁷ International law becomes *de facto* suspended in the context of energy dependence and the double standards applied in positioning towards Russia. A relevant example is the continuation of economic and commercial relations with Russia, as vessels operating in the Black Sea switched off their navigation systems at the end of March 2022, engaging in "dark activity".⁴⁸

In order to dominate maritime and energy trade routes, Russia has applied tactics and instruments aimed at challenging territorial integrity, creating and exploiting vulnerabilities, increasing its military presence, weaponising energy and trade dependencies, and disrupting

connectivity.⁴⁹ Russia's hybrid attacks have also targeted the critical infrastructure of EU member states, repeatedly engaging in deliberate cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, electoral interference, and violations of European airspace by fighter aircraft and long-range attack drones in order to reduce support for Ukraine.⁵⁰ Russia has employed New Generation Warfare (NGW), encompassing cyberattacks, information warfare, and physical sabotage.⁵¹

As an integral part of hybrid warfare, cyber threats have primarily targeted the sabotage of critical state capacities, employing a wide range of cascading techniques and tools, such as data breaches, ransomware attacks, and sophisticated state-sponsored cyber espionage. One can notice that cyberattacks in the Black Sea region are conducted by state-affiliated actors (e.g., Sandworm – VOODOO Bear, Fancy Bear – APT28, Gamaredon – Shuckworm – Russia affiliation; MuddyWater/TEMP.Zagros – Iran affiliation), as well as by non-state actors with no explicit affiliation (e.g., Killnet, TA558, UNC4841, MoleRATs/Extreme Jackal).⁵²

Legal ambiguities have been exploited to justify and conduct aggressive maritime activities. Russia has declared extensive “temporary danger areas” in the Black Sea in order to restrict access to strategic maritime corridors. It has relied on military exercises and the *de facto* control of contested maritime spaces to erode the security environment and disrupt commercial maritime transport.⁵³

A systemic vulnerability affecting critical maritime infrastructure in the Black Sea is represented by the use of indirect actors and undercover agents to manipulate submarine cables and to conduct unauthorised surveillance of offshore platforms.⁵⁴ The use of Maritime Autonomous Vehicles (MAVs) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) constitutes an emerging threat integrated into Russia's hybrid warfare toolkit in Ukraine and the Black Sea for surveillance, intelligence collection, and sabotage.⁵⁵

In the context of Russia's war in Ukraine, fought in the air, on land, and at sea, the most problematic issue from the perspective of international law concerns the delineation of the boundaries of warfare, with major and imme-

diate implications for the entire region. A relevant example is the spread of Russian naval mines detected even in the national waters of Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria.⁵⁶

3. Protection of Critical Maritime Infrastructure in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea

The identification and protection of critical infrastructure is not limited to a purely technical approach, but rather represents a high-level political choice made in response to, and in anticipation of a complex and volatile environment.⁵⁷ In general terms, critical infrastructure includes the facilities, systems, and networks that are vital to the functioning and resilience of a society by providing essential public services for the economy, the internal market, security, and defence.⁵⁸ Given their vital impact on the everyday life of society, critical infrastructure covers the following sectors: (1) Energy (power plants; electrical grid; fuel supply); (2) Transportation (roads and highways, railways, airports, seaports); (3) Communications (telephone networks; internet infrastructure; broadcast systems); (4) Water (water treatment plants; distribution systems; wastewater facilities); (5) Health Care (hospitals, clinics; emergency services); (6) Financial (banks, insurance companies, ATMs, payment systems).⁵⁹

NATO employs a comprehensive definition of critical infrastructure that includes “a nation's infrastructure assets, facilities, systems, networks, and processes that support the military, economic, political and/or social life on which a nation and/or NATO depends”.⁶⁰ In relation to the risks and disadvantages created for the Alliance's operational power, NATO uses three distinct subcategories to classify this concept, namely: Critical National Infrastructure (CNI), Mission-Vital Infrastructure (MVI), and Key Infrastructure (KI).⁶¹ The maintenance of vital societal functions related to health, security, safety, and social or economic well-being constitutes the indicators for identifying critical infrastructure within the EU, the disruption or destruction of which would generate a significant impact within a Member State.⁶²

Ensuring the resilience of critical infrastructure represents a key stake of the EU–NATO strategic partnership and cooperation, further underscored by the 2022 attacks on the Nord Stream pipelines and by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. These developments provide a relevant example of the diversification of strategies and actions aimed at destabilising critical infrastructure in various ways: through espionage and intelligence gathering, physical attacks, hostile reconnaissance, malicious hybrid and cyber activities, the exploitation of dependencies, or seizure.⁶³

Maritime infrastructures differ fundamentally from land-based ones.⁶⁴ Specifically, critical maritime infrastructure (CMI) represents “the backbone of modern societies and the lifelines of economies,” with implications for communications, transport, energy transfer, trade, and beyond.⁶⁵ Critical maritime infrastructure includes subsea data cables, offshore oil and gas platforms, ports, and wind farms, which contribute vitally to national and regional security, economic stability, and the functioning of society through the circulation of energy, goods, and information.⁶⁶ In the 21st century, critical maritime infrastructure has become a primary target for state and non-state actors competing for control over the “blue economy”—a vast network that encompasses over 80% of international trade.⁶⁷

Protecting and strengthening critical maritime infrastructure in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea highlights the power of cooperation and the effectiveness of common transnational strategies to manage vulnerabilities, risks, and complex, multiple threats targeting critical energy infrastructure, digital and cyber infrastructure, ports, and subsea communication cables.⁶⁸ Ensuring the security and resilience of essential maritime infrastructure requires safeguarding ports, shipping routes, choke-points, offshore energy installations, Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), and related assets.⁶⁹

As focal points of maritime insecurity, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea represent microcosms of hybrid challenges to CMI within a regional security landscape that has been radically transformed following the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s war against Ukraine.⁷⁰

Russian hybrid warfare has consistently sought to weaken security, critical and economic infrastructure, the legitimacy of national governments, and the capacity for allied cooperation, with the aim of creating and sustaining a climate of instability and uncertainty.⁷¹

Hybrid escalation resulting from persistent pressure and incursions involving drones, electronic interference, GPS jamming, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns is continuously testing the unity and coordination of Allies, as well as the credibility of collective defence. Legal gaps and grey zones governing the maritime domain do not provide adequate protection for subsea infrastructure (e.g., *the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS)), making it easier for hybrid actors to exploit these vulnerabilities.⁷²

Critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea continues to be assessed both in relation to energy independence and to participation in bi- and multilateral frameworks for the exchange of best practices, with the aim of anticipating and deterring hostile actions with potentially destructive consequences at an early stage.

Within NATO, security is indivisible and is closely linked to the ability of member states and the Alliance as a whole to develop individual and collective capacities to defend one another. The concept of resilience thus derives from the need to develop a comprehensive framework capable of effectively fulfilling the Alliance’s core tasks: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security.⁷³

Unlike the traditional approach, which primarily emphasised strategy and military defence, NATO’s approach reflects a profoundly broadened understanding of security, aligning with the so-called “gospel of resilience.”⁷⁴ Resilience is “embedded in NATO’s DNA”⁷⁵, grounded in Article 3 of the *North Atlantic Treaty* (1949), and was explicitly enshrined at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016.⁷⁶ According to Jamie Shea, NATO’s first deputy assistant secretary general for Emerging Security Challenges, resilience was defined as “the corollary of deterrence and reassurance measures in the classical military sphere.”⁷⁷

Rooted in Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, “resilience is a national responsibility and a

collective commitment⁷⁷⁸ to protect societies, populations, and shared values in an increasingly complex security environment.⁷⁹ NATO's commitment undertaken at the Warsaw Summit in 2016 (renewed in 2021 and reiterated in 2024 in Washington) emphasises strengthening national and collective resilience and civil preparedness through continuous and effective self-help and mutual assistance.⁸⁰ The 2025 Hague Summit⁸¹ marks a shift from a general orientation towards a more structured and operational framework, with a focus on dynamic risk assessment, preparedness for hybrid threats, and the protection of critical infrastructure.⁸² Resilience is more deeply integrated into defence planning, including regular stress-testing and peer review processes.⁸³

A leitmotif of NATO's contemporary narratives—individual and collective resilience, embedded in NATO's Strategic Concept⁸⁴ (2022)—includes the following aspects: staying strong together, making NATO a stronger political alliance, and embracing a more comprehensive approach.⁸⁵ NATO's repertoire positions resilience as a precursor to security⁸⁶, a robust approach that highlights a risk governance model whose core stake is NATO's self-projection in the world, including its relevance, moral authority, and global reputation.⁸⁷

Strengthening the Alliance's resilience is a prerequisite for demonstrating unity and power rapidly and decisively. Consequently, intensified joint efforts stem from a strategic and comprehensive approach that includes: ensuring the capacity to consult, decide, and act together; protecting and developing critical infrastructure (on land, at sea, in space, and in cyberspace) and key industries; investing in robust, flexible, and interoperable military capabilities; securing and diversifying supply chains; monitoring and managing natural hazards and climate change to protect energy security; securing next-generation communications systems by addressing and managing the impact of emerging technologies; leveraging expertise from the private and non-governmental sectors; and pursuing mutually reinforcing and beneficial coordination with the European Union through concrete measures and effective synergies.⁸⁸

In the context of multiple and successive crises driven by the emergence of terrorism, the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NATO has demonstrated institutional adaptability in relation to its military and strategic foundations and the limits of its global interventionism. In security terms, NATO seeks to protect itself against threats it aims to avoid and/or deter. To become the epitome of resilience in the contemporary international political arena, NATO has integrated a framework of continuous risk management thinking and action. This approach involves identifying, anticipating, and preparing for diverse risks in order to mitigate damage and address root causes.⁸⁹

Facing current threats, NATO is recalibrating its posture, with a focus on revitalising collective capabilities in key domains. Maritime security has become an essential component of the Alliance's peace and prosperity⁹⁰, in response to Russia's "direct threat" and China's "systemic challenges".⁹¹ The Alliance's maritime posture supports NATO's three core missions—deterrence and defence; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security—by fulfilling strategic, security, and warfighting functions.⁹²

NATO's resilience threat landscape includes a wide array of conventional, unconventional, and hybrid tactics, instruments, and activities, including terrorist attacks, malicious cyber activities, disinformation, and hostile information operations aimed at destabilising states and societies, undermining democratic processes, good governance, and the shared values underpinning the Alliance.⁹³

The attacks on the Nord Stream pipelines (2022) and the Balticconnector pipeline (2023) acted as catalysts for expanding, diversifying, and strengthening NATO's activity portfolio. In February 2023, NATO established a new Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell in Brussels to develop a "community of trust" through information-sharing, vulnerability identification, and the exchange of best practices between military and civilian authorities. Following the Vilnius Summit, NATO established the Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure within NATO's Maritime Command (MARCOM).⁹⁴

Currently, negligent or malicious actions are causing serious incidents that directly affect critical undersea infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. To deter, detect, and counter hostile activities, NATO launched the enhanced vigilance activity “Baltic Sentry”⁹⁵, led by Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFCBS) and operating under the overall command of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe⁹⁶. This initiative complements the efforts and resources of Allied states in the region (e.g., the Commander Task Force–Baltic, which provides an integrated regional picture of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea).⁹⁷ Since January 2025, information-sharing and response coordination through multi-domain activities under the Baltic Sentry umbrella have significantly contributed to threat identification and the enhancement of critical subsea infrastructure protection capabilities.⁹⁸

The specificity of the Baltic Sea region is shaped by bi-, tri-, and multilateral defence and security cooperation formats (e.g., the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), the Nordic-Baltic Defence Cooperation (NB8), and the Allied Baltic NATO–countries format), integrated under the umbrella concept of nodal defence, which highlights variable geometries of cooperation and functional roles depending on the type of threat.⁹⁹

On the Eastern Flank, NATO’s response to violations of the airspace of several Allies has focused on adopting a flexible, multi-domain approach to enhance NATO’s vigilance and its defence and deterrence capabilities¹⁰⁰. In 2025, NATO also launched enhanced vigilance activity Eastern Sentry, for the entire Eastern Flank of the Alliance, in order to improve Allied coordination and to reinforce capabilities and resources.¹⁰¹ This approach builds on the military security decisions adopted by NATO for the Baltic Sea and Black Sea states following the outbreak of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.¹⁰²

NATO’s maritime posture in the Black Sea is shaped by *the Montreux Convention* (1936). The current situation in the region limits the permanent deployment of naval assets to NATO’s littoral members only (Türkiye, Romania and Bulgaria). The strategic importance of the Black Sea and maritime contiguity were

integrated into the NATO Strategic Concept (2022), on the basis of which the Alliance decided to establish four additional multinational battlegroups on the Eastern Flank (in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia).¹⁰³ The NATO Madrid Summit (2022) outlined a new NATO posture in the Black Sea region through the deployment of troops on the Eastern Flank and the strengthening of response plans in Romania. In addition, NATO allocated resources for airspace surveillance, enhancing defence capabilities, and increasing the resilience of fuel supply chains in the region (through the expansion of the NATO Pipeline System (NPS) network).¹⁰⁴

The MCM Black Sea Task Group was established by Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria on 11 January 2024, with the aim of maintaining a secure maritime traffic in the Black Sea. In this context, the three NATO member states committed to conducting mine countermeasure surveillance, reconnaissance, and neutralisation actions, as well as performing related search and rescue operations at sea.¹⁰⁵ This is a very efficient and effective trilateral defence and security cooperation format in the Black Sea region and a real proof that the three Allies in this region cooperate and work together to enhance security in the Black Sea.

Resilience in the Black Sea region involves a complex equation encompassing security, connectivity, cooperation, competitiveness, and sustainable development. The EU’s strategy in the region is designed both in relation to the hybrid threats posed by hostile actors—against which the EU advocates coordinated, rapid, and effective deterrence and defence responses—and to the valorisation of the region’s economic, competitive, and cultural potential.

EU cooperation in the Black Sea emphasises shared values and regional cooperation in order to transform the region into a safe, interconnected, and prosperous space that is energy independent and resilient in the long term. The EU’s central approach in the Black Sea is closely connected to its Common Foreign and Security Policy, with the EU acting as a promoter of international law, regional connectivity, and sustainable investments. Within this logic, the EU supports the overall reconstruction of Ukraine and coordinated

engagement with Türkiye—a partner of strategic importance that facilitated the Black Sea Grain Initiative, prisoner exchanges, and efforts to counter Russia’s shadow fleet.¹⁰⁶

Joint EU actions in the field of cooperation in the Black Sea region are oriented towards addressing immediate conflict and security challenges and are structured around three main pillars: (1) strengthening security, stability, and resilience; (2) boosting sustainable growth and prosperity; and (3) promoting environmental protection, climate resilience, and preparedness, as well as civil protection.¹⁰⁷

The modernisation of dual-use transport infrastructure, equipping maritime and river ports with the necessary infrastructure, cooperation through shared networks, the strengthening of partnerships, information-sharing, and the use of innovative technologies and AI represent key actions integrated into the EU’s efforts to protect critical infrastructure, strengthen European defence, and enhance maritime capabilities in the Black Sea.¹⁰⁸

In order to leverage economic and strategic potential, the EU proposes a regional connectivity agenda aligned with extended trans-European networks, combined with the diversification of transport corridors and the development of alternative, resilient, and secure digital and energy connectivity networks.¹⁰⁹ In the Black Sea region, EU commitments aim at building a broader energy union (through the integration of intermittent renewable energy sources into energy systems and the installation of new submarine cables) and strengthening digital resilience at both EU and regional levels (through secure, high-capacity internet connections).¹¹⁰

As an advocate of balanced and sustainable development, the EU supports in the Black Sea region the prioritisation of investments in the blue economy (e.g., sustainable aquaculture, coastal and maritime tourism), cross-border smart specialisation, the decarbonisation of key sectors, and the sustainable use of maritime resources, as well as the valorisation of scientific and cultural diplomacy. EU commitments include the establishment of the Black Sea Digital Twin platform to support the efforts of the Digital Twin Ocean platform aimed at strengthening resilience, monitoring

pollution, protecting biodiversity, improving maritime traffic coordination, and facilitating cross-border data exchange.¹¹¹

The Baltic Sea is high on the EU’s strategic radar in terms of priorities and actions aimed at strengthening critical infrastructure (e.g., submarine cables, power cables, smart cables, communications infrastructure), with an emphasis on prevention, detection, response, and repair. EU actions have contributed significantly to the interconnection and integration of Northern Europe into the European energy market, eliminating the energy isolation of the Baltic States and Finland.¹¹²

More than symbolic, the EU Agenda for the Baltic Sea was presented by President von der Leyen on 9 February 2025 on the occasion of Baltic Energy Independence Day in Vilnius and highlights the need to increase EU resilience and preparedness by establishing a horizontal security framework (the Critical Entities Resilience Directive and the NIS 2 Directive). The success of this priority is conditional upon the transposition of the legal and security framework into Member States’ national legislation and the subsequent uniform application of rules to all relevant actors and entities.

Detection and monitoring of threats through strengthened cooperation at regional, national, and European levels, are currently assessed as insufficient and fragmented across different layers of surveillance mechanisms. Although the EU has managed to detect recent incidents in the Baltic Sea rapidly and in real time, persistent challenges relate to establishing intent, analysing predictions, and identifying threat indicators. The EU proposes the establishment of an integrated submarine cable surveillance mechanism to create a single, comprehensive situational picture at the level of maritime basins. For the effectiveness of this mechanism and the integration of next-generation capabilities, the EU calls on Member States to invest in strong civilian and military approaches. To test the integrated surveillance approach, the European Commission proposes the rapid establishment of a dedicated regional hub in the Baltic Sea region.

Response and recovery through stronger EU-level cooperation and solidarity are to be coordinated in crisis situations. The EU’s

response to recent incidents in the Baltic Sea emphasises leveraging synergies for an adapted and coordinated response across different scenarios and crisis management frameworks. In the medium term, the Commission supports the acquisition or contracting of additional repair and cable-laying vessels, as well as the establishment of a multifunctional EU reserve fleet of cable ships for emergency use. Operational cooperation with NATO constitutes a key component in strengthening resilience and ensuring the protection of cables and other critical submarine infrastructure.

Conclusions

The research showed that threats targeting critical maritime infrastructure have become increasingly complex and interconnected, especially in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, affecting sectors such as transport, energy, telecommunications, data networks, and cybersecurity. By analysing major events, institutional responses, and strategic actions undertaken by both state and non-state actors, the study identified important patterns of cooperation and resilience-building in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions.

The findings indicate that the Russian invasion of Ukraine accelerated the transformation of maritime security governance and increased the strategic importance of protecting critical maritime infrastructure within NATO and EU security agendas. The study also showed that NATO and EU member states made important progress in monitoring and identifying hybrid threats, improving strategic coordination, and strengthening information-sharing mechanisms.

At the same time, the research highlighted that preventive and resilience-oriented approaches remain less developed compared to reactive and crisis-management measures. This demonstrates the need for stronger and more integrated NATO–EU cooperation frameworks focused on prevention, continuous monitoring, and the protection of critical maritime infrastructure.

Overall, the article underlines that the security of maritime infrastructure in the Baltic

Sea and Black Sea regions has become an essential component of regional stability, strategic resilience, and European security cooperation. The two regions are confronted with the same threats targeting critical maritime infrastructure and, within this framework, sustained unity and cooperation remain crucial on the entire Eastern Flank in order to collectively address the shared challenges and enhance the resilience of our societies.

Notes

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NATO as a Stratified Security Regime: Differentiated Solidarity among Member States

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Abstract

The geopolitical environment is undergoing accelerated transformations, and the Euro-Atlantic security architecture is increasingly influenced by changes in the international strategic environment. The return of power competition, the diversification of sources of conflict, and pressure on the international order have brought the role of alliances back to the forefront as mechanisms for organising cooperation in the field of security. States tend to adopt an increasing number of types of partnerships and alliances to maximise their security efforts. However, NATO remains the main collective defence framework for the transatlantic space, while itself undergoing a process of adaptation to new strategic realities. The aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022 accelerated the adaptation of NATO's strategic posture and, although the main mission remained the same, brought the debate on the distribution of responsibilities among the Allies back into focus.

This paper simultaneously analyses NATO as a military alliance and as an international security regime, in order to examine whether internal differentiation can be conceptualised as a structural property of its functioning and not merely as a source of intra-allied tension. The present analysis comes against the backdrop of recent debates on the future of the transatlantic relationship and pressures from the United States for European states to assume increased security responsibilities within the Alliance. The paper starts from the hypothesis that, although allied solidarity remains uniform at the normative level, from a functional point of view, its implementation is carried out differently, as a result of distinct perceptions of threats, the different roles assumed by the Allies, and the uneven distribution of strategic responsibilities. The article argues that this internal stratification can be understood not as an expression of the fragmentation of the Alliance, but as a structural and adaptive feature of the way in which allied solidarity is organised and one which, in essence, does not affect the cohesion of the Alliance in any way.

Keywords: differentiated solidarity, NATO, burden-sharing, alliance theory, security regime, two-tier alliance

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1. Introduction

Recent years have brought back into focus a gradual deterioration of the international security environment, influenced by the return of power competition, the increasingly frequent challenges to the principles that underpinned the post-Cold War international order, and the amplification of strategic risks. All these transformations have relaunched the debate on the stability of the international

order and have brought renewed attention to the political-military dimension of security¹. At the same time, Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 has largely accelerated structural trends already present in the international system, reflected in the intensification of geopolitical competition and the reconfiguration of alignment patterns and strategic cooperation². Under these conditions, the collective response of states to uncertainty and threats has increasingly relied on alliances as

instruments for maintaining the security order, as well as on frameworks within which responsibilities are adjusted in response to strategic pressure. A growing body of opinion³ holds that traditional mechanisms of international governance are facing increasing strain, as states seek more flexible forms of cooperation and strategic alignment. Accordingly, alliances and strategic partnerships are gaining greater relevance, as states look for more adaptable frameworks for organising security, not only as a response to shared threats, but also as a means of managing a more fragmented and competitive international environment.

In this setting, NATO remains the main institutional mechanism for collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic area, but the challenges generated by the evolving strategic environment have brought renewed attention to how allied solidarity is enacted in practice⁴. At the same time, growing differences regarding threat perceptions, strategic priorities, operational roles, and the distribution of responsibilities among Allies increasingly suggest that traditional analytical frameworks are no longer sufficient to fully explain NATO's internal dynamics. Within this framework, the article introduces the concept of *stratification* as an analytical tool meant to capture the multiple and overlapping forms of differentiation that coexist within the Alliance alongside allied solidarity.

The analysis unfolds amid emerging tensions within the Alliance, closely linked to the concept of *burden-sharing*. For several decades, the United States has held a leadership role within NATO and continues to be the primary contributor in terms of military capabilities, financial resources, and operational direction, which has highlighted the need for a more balanced assumption of security responsibilities by European Allies⁵. Significantly, recent analyses have shifted the debate from the traditional logic of “burden-sharing” to that of *responsibility-sharing*, in order to emphasise the idea that the issue no longer concerns exclusively the distribution of costs and capabilities, but the differentiated assumption of strategic roles and responsibilities within the Alliance⁶. These tensions manifest themselves, in essence, at the intersection between expectations regarding the distribution of allied con-

tributions and differing perceptions of global threats, which generate distinct forms of participation in the collective defence effort.

At the same time, the concept of a *two-tier alliance* has been reevaluated, initially appearing over a decade ago in a speech by Robert Gates, former US secretary of defence, who warned of the emergence of unequal levels of contribution and commitment among Allies⁷. In the context of accelerated strategic transformations after 2022, this debate has been brought back into focus by analysts who suggest that the changes NATO is going through go beyond the binary logic of a *two-tier* alliance and indicate more nuanced forms of internal differentiation regarding roles, threat perceptions, and the distribution of responsibilities among Allies⁸.

Recent debates on the future of the transatlantic relationship, pressures to recalibrate responsibilities within the Alliance, and proposals for new mechanisms to manage strategic transition suggest that differentiation is no longer merely an empirical issue but is increasingly articulated at the level of strategic reflection on NATO's future. This paper seeks to analyse NATO through alliance theory and security regime theory, in order to explain how allied solidarity coexists with differentiated forms of participation within the Alliance. The research problem addressed in the article concerns how to explain the coexistence of the Alliance's uniform normative solidarity and the functional differentiation of roles, threat perceptions, and responsibilities among member states. **The hypothesis of this article is that such stratification does not reflect a logic of imbalance or fragmentation⁹ but can be understood as a structural and adaptive expression of allied cohesion.** Viewed through this lens, differentiation becomes less a deviation from solidarity and more a structural characteristic of NATO as a security regime.

2. NATO between Alliance Theory and Security Regime Theory

In order to explain, for the purposes of this paper, the relationship between allied solidarity and differentiated forms of responsibility-shar-

ing, we consider it appropriate to draw on two complementary theoretical frameworks. Thus, on the one hand, alliance theory provides the conceptual tools necessary to understand the cohesion, mutual commitments, and tensions inherent in cooperation within an alliance. On the other hand, security regime theory allows us to interpret NATO not only as a collective defence commitment, but also as a normative and institutional structure within which solidarity functions as an organising principle. Thus, this section substantiates the argument that differentiation among Allies can be understood as an expression of the functioning of a security regime that adapts to new threats, rather than as a source of tension within the Alliance.

Drawing on established models, alliance theory offers several relevant arguments that allow us to classify NATO within the category of international alliances. Classical definitions of alliances start from the idea of creating a group of states bound by mutual commitments to collective defence, aimed at a common response to threats, and grounded in shared political and strategic obligations¹⁰. A significant part of the specialised literature, rooted in realist and neorealist traditions, explains the formation of alliances as a response to the constraints of international anarchy and the distribution of power, with states associating to counterbalance threats and preserve their security.

In classical realism, Morgenthau places alliances within the logic of the balance of power, viewing them as instruments through which states seek to counterbalance the disproportionate concentration of power and prevent the emergence of a dominant position of a potential adversary¹¹. Within this framework, NATO can be understood as a collective defence alliance grounded in mutual commitments in the face of external risks. This interpretation is further developed in the structural neorealism of Waltz, where alliances emerge as systemic responses to the distribution of power in an anarchic international system. States associate to prevent dominance by any single actor and to preserve their own security¹². From this perspective, alliances reflect a trade-off between the benefits of collective security and the costs associated not only

with reduced decision-making autonomy, but also with the risks of entrapment, namely the possibility of becoming involved in a military conflict in support of an allied state. States therefore accept varying degrees of constraint and strategic exposure depending on their interests, threat perceptions, and capabilities¹³. This structural tension explains why commitments within alliances are not uniform and why cooperation is inherently differentiated, as Allies seek to balance the benefits of collective protection against the risks of entrapment, free-riding, or potential abandonment resulting from divergent strategic calculations among member states.

While these explanations clarify why alliances form, they say less about how they function internally, particularly when member states' interests diverge. The literature on alliance politics¹⁴, especially through the contributions of Snyder, states that these are not homogeneous structures, but arrangements in which interests are only partially convergent, and cooperation is accompanied by tensions regarding the level of commitment and the distribution of costs. These dynamics indicate that differentiation is not a deviation from cooperation, but a structural feature of alliance functioning. Commitments are continuously adjusted through negotiation, and their credibility depends on mutual expectations and actual behaviour. In this sense, differentiation among Allies does not depart from the logic of alliances, but results from their normal mode of operation. Allied solidarity can thus be understood both as a commitment derived from alliance logic and as a constitutive norm of a security regime.

However, this perspective treats alliances primarily as instruments of states, explaining behaviour through interests and systemic constraints. While it captures variations in commitment, it provides a more limited account of how such differences are integrated into stable frameworks of cooperation.

At this point, the literature on international regimes offers a complementary analytical framework. In the sense formulated by Krasner¹⁵, regimes can be understood as *"principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations*

converge in a given issue-area"¹⁶. Jervis extends this framework to the field of security, allowing cooperation to be interpreted not only as the result of strategic calculation, but also as an effect of institutionalised expectations that structure state behaviour. In this view, a security regime consists of "*those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behaviour in the belief that others will reciprocate*"¹⁷. At the same time, the literature¹⁸ emphasises that regimes are more difficult to consolidate in the security domain than in other domains, such as economics, due to the sensitivity of the issues involved and their direct implications for state survival. Uncertainty about the intentions of other actors and the risks associated with interdependence limit states' willingness to engage in stable forms of cooperation.

Despite these constraints, Jervis shows that security regimes can emerge when states develop shared expectations and are willing to restrain their behaviour in anticipation of reciprocity. Under such conditions, cooperation does not eliminate the *security dilemma*, but mitigates it by increasing predictability. His analysis identifies such dynamics in the European Concert, often cited as an example of a security regime in which states maintained a degree of order through coordination and mutual anticipation of behaviour¹⁹.

So, NATO can be interpreted not only as a political-military alliance, but also as a security regime in which state behaviour is structured by institutionalised norms, rules, and expectations. Allied solidarity extends beyond formal treaty obligations and is sustained by a broader framework of expectations regarding support in times of crisis. Within this framework, differences among Allies are not incompatible with regime functioning, as such functioning does not require uniformity, but rather convergence around shared principles of action. Variations in contributions, roles, or threat perceptions can thus be understood as part of the functioning of a security regime, rather than as indicators of declining cohesion.

Building on this perspective, scholars applying regime theory to NATO argue that traditional alliance-based explanations are insufficient to account for the stability and

continuity of cooperation within the Alliance. Incorporating the perspective of international regimes highlights the role of institutional factors in shaping state behaviour²⁰. NATO can thus be understood as an institutional framework that stabilises expectations and sustains relatively consistent patterns of cooperation over time, even in a changing strategic environment²¹.

At the same time, the specialised literature that analyses the North Atlantic Alliance has frequently conceptualised the differentiation between Allies through the notion of a *two-tier alliance*, used to describe the persistent discrepancies regarding the contributions and level of commitment of member states²². Empirical analyses of NATO operations and resource distribution consistently reveal significant differences among Allies, both in terms of risk exposure and effective contributions to collective security²³. Studies of NATO cohesion²⁴ further show that these differences extend beyond contributions to include variations in strategic priorities, the use of capabilities, and levels of engagement across different security domains.

Based on these arguments, this paper aims to go beyond the binary interpretation suggested by the concept of a *two-tier alliance* and to conceptualise NATO as a stratified security regime. The concept of stratification is used in this paper as an analytical tool to describe how differentiation between Allies manifests itself on several interdependent levels, without implying a formal hierarchy or fragmentation of the Alliance. This approach allows for the simultaneous capture of several levels of differentiation that coexist within the Alliance, in terms of threat perceptions, assumed functional roles, and the distribution of strategic responsibilities. Thus, differentiation does not appear as a deviation from allied solidarity, but as an expression of the way in which it is organised and implemented in practice. Understanding NATO as a stratified security regime allows for the reconciliation of the normative character of solidarity with its differentiated manifestations, providing the analytical framework necessary for the empirical examination of these dynamics in the following sections.

The shift in the debate from *burden-sharing* to *responsibility-sharing* reflects a broader change in emphasis, from the distribution of costs to the allocation of strategic roles and responsibilities²⁵. In this context, the *two-tier alliance* model remains limited, as it reduces differentiation to a binary opposition, while the literature on alliance politics shows that variation in commitment is a structural feature of cooperation²⁶.

From this perspective, stratification can be analysed along three main dimensions. The first concerns threat perceptions, which shape the strategic priorities of member states and generate differences in their approach to collective security²⁷. The second dimension relates to the functional roles assumed by Allies, reflecting distinct but complementary forms of contribution to collective defence²⁸. The third concerns the distribution of strategic responsibilities, which results from the interaction between capabilities, geographical position, and political options²⁹.

In this framework, differentiation does not represent a departure from allied solidarity, but rather the manner in which it is structured and implemented in practice. Stratification thus describes a form of internal organisation within NATO in which diverse forms of participation coexist with convergence around shared principles. Rather than indicating fragmentation, differentiation can therefore be understood as a structural property of NATO, providing the analytical foundation for examining its empirical manifestations in the following sections.

3. Forms of Stratification within NATO

Building on this conceptual framework, the analysis shifts to the practical level in order to examine how stratification manifests itself within the Alliance. Differentiation is thus not understood as a dysfunction, but as a form of organising cooperation within NATO, in line with recent developments. Differences among Allies emerge across several interdependent levels, reflecting both the diversity of the se-

curity environments in which they operate and NATO's adaptation to a changing strategic context. For the purposes of this paper, the analysis focuses on three main dimensions: threat perceptions, the functional roles assumed by Allies, and the distribution of strategic responsibilities. These dimensions do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact and reinforce one another, generating distinct forms of participation in the collective security effort.

The first dimension concerns differentiated threat perceptions, which underpin the emergence of distinct strategic priorities among member states. Stratification begins at the cognitive level, as states do not start from a uniform definition of threats, and this generates strategic differentiation. This does not lead to fragmentation of allied action, but rather to the coexistence within NATO of different security priorities, managed simultaneously through the Alliance's institutional mechanisms³⁰.

This differentiation becomes especially visible at the regional level, where geographical positioning and the security environment directly shape how member states define threats. Recent analyses indicate that such variation represents one of the main sources of strategic differentiation within the Alliance, without undermining its cohesion. The distinction between NATO's Eastern and Southern flanks provides a useful framework for understanding these variations.

On the Eastern Flank, threat perception is dominated by conventional risks associated with the Russian Federation, especially after 2022. Recent developments³¹ have reinforced the priority given to deterrence and collective defence, reflected both in the increase in the allied presence and in intensified regional cooperation, including within the *Bucharest Nine format* (B9). The literature³² highlights that this orientation is linked to the centrality of conventional threats in Eastern Europe and the need for rapid adaptation of NATO's posture. Moreover, recent dynamics also suggest a trend towards expanding and consolidating cooperation on the Eastern Flank, including through the gradual integration of Nordic states into regional coordination mechanisms. The 2026 initiatives to invite these

states to B9 meetings and to organise a joint summit of the Eastern and Nordic countries reflect the need for broader strategic coordination from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. This vision indicates that converging perceptions of threats generate the need for broader frameworks of regional coordination³³. The impact of these formats remains primarily political, with their effectiveness depending on translation into concrete NATO measures³⁴.

By contrast, the Southern Flank is characterised by a different spectrum of threats, predominantly non-conventional in nature, including regional instability, terrorism, migration, and state fragility in the Southern Neighbourhood. Analyses of this region highlight that Southern Allies prioritise crisis management and the stabilisation of the broader security environment, leading to a different approach to collective security compared to the Eastern Flank³⁵. The emphasis is placed less on classical military deterrence and more on preventing instability and managing diffuse risks. In addition, the security dynamics in the Southern Neighbourhood are increasingly shaped by indirect competition between state and non-state actors, often manifested through proxy conflicts. These developments turn the Southern Flank into a space of persistent strategic competition, where NATO faces not isolated threats but interconnected networks of instability that indirectly affect Euro-Atlantic security and complicate traditional deterrence and response mechanisms³⁶.

At the same time, Northern European states reflect another dimension of threat perception, where security is approached through the lens of hybrid, cyber, and maritime risks, alongside a strong emphasis on societal resilience. Recent analyses show that the Northern Flank is becoming increasingly relevant for NATO's deterrence posture, especially in the context of intensified military activity in the Arctic and the growing strategic importance of the northern maritime domain³⁷. Regional cooperation is strengthened through mechanisms such as *NORDEFCO*, which facilitates coordination in capabilities, planning, and interoperability. The directions outlined in the "*New Vision of NORDEFCO 2030*"³⁸ indicate deeper integration in operational planning,

joint capability development, and military mobility, suggesting the gradual consolidation of a regional pillar capable of directly supporting NATO's deterrence and defence posture in Northern Europe. This orientation is reflected in the development of naval capabilities and enhanced maritime cooperation between Nordic states and transatlantic Allies³⁹.

These differences do not point to divergent strategic directions. Rather, the argument advanced here is that the security priorities of member states are shaped by different regional contexts. Variations in threat perception represent the first manifestation of stratification, as they generate distinct levels of strategic prioritisation. These, in turn, influence how states participate in the allied effort. In practice, this dynamic reflects how NATO integrates differentiation into its functioning, confirming its structural character⁴⁰.

The real consequences are evident in terms of planning, military posture, and resource allocation. In 2025, NATO launched *Eastern Sentry*⁴¹, a multi-domain military activity aimed at strengthening vigilance along the Eastern Flank, through additional air, naval, and land capabilities, including fighter aircraft, helicopters, air defence systems, surveillance assets, and frigates. NATO also identifies *Forward Land Forces* as a central element of its Eastern Flank posture, organised into eight multinational battlegroups deployed on allied territory⁴². In parallel, on the Northern Flank, adaptation is reflected in intensified deterrence and defence activities in the Arctic and North Atlantic, including exercises and operational coordination among NATO strategic commanders, emphasising the importance of protecting maritime lines of communication and critical infrastructure⁴³. On the Southern Flank, this differentiation is reflected in stabilisation and crisis-management activities, including partnership missions, training, and capacity-building initiatives in the Southern Neighbourhood, such as *NATO Mission Iraq* or *Operation Sea Guardian*, which reflect the focus on preventing instability and managing diffuse risks⁴⁴. In this sense, variations in threat perception not only shape the strategic priorities but also determine the concrete way in which states participate in the allied effort,

preparing the ground for a differentiated distribution of roles and responsibilities within NATO.

The second dimension of this stratification concerns the functional roles and responsibilities assumed by member states within the framework of collective defence. At this level, differentiation appears in the concrete distribution of contributions, capabilities, and responsibilities among Allies. This distribution does not imply a formal hierarchy among states. It must be understood in terms of complementarity, whereby Allies contribute differently to the same collective objective.

In these terms, this is visible in the way NATO organises capabilities and defence planning. The *NATO Defence Planning Process* (NDPP) aims to align national planning with allied requirements, ensuring that member states can provide the necessary forces and capabilities efficiently. It identifies, develops, and monitors the delivery of capability requirements, meaning that military responsibilities are distributed according to operational needs, national capacities, and relevance⁴⁵.

Forward Land Forces offer a clear example of functional differentiation on the Eastern Flank. These structures consist of eight multinational battlegroups located in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, with varying size and composition depending on military requirements. They are provided by the *framework nations* and other *contributing Allies* on a voluntary, sustainable, and rotational basis. This architecture shows that collective defence relies on differentiated roles: some states provide territory and infrastructure for deployment, others command and structure forces, while others contribute reinforcement and support capabilities⁴⁶. This distribution is shaped by geography, political choices, and levels of ambition, which explains variation in contributions.

A similar logic underpins the *Framework Nations Concept*, designed as a tool for defence cooperation through which states coordinate resources and capabilities around leading actors. Analyses that address this concept⁴⁷ show that it promotes national specialisation, mutual coordination, and regional planning, strengthening collective defence through mul-

tinational cooperation. Differentiated roles therefore do not weaken solidarity, but represent an institutionalised way of organising it, whereby specialisation and coordination structure allied contributions.

This distribution of roles is also relevant to the debate on *burden-sharing*. Discussions on allied contributions were reviewed during the Trump administration, amid criticism of perceived imbalances between the United States and European Allies. The issue concerns not only defence spending levels, but also the nature of contributions, the types of capabilities developed, and the willingness to assume concrete responsibilities within the Alliance⁴⁸. From this perspective, differences in contributions reflect not only political choices, but also the structural asymmetry of alliances, where task distribution is inherently differentiated. Reactions to these pressures reflect not only actual contributions but also their political interpretation, which explains the persistence of tensions even under conditions of functional complementarity⁴⁹.

In this framework, the reactions of Allies to pressures for task redistribution reflect not only the level of contributions but also how they are perceived and evaluated politically, which explains the persistence of tensions even in the face of differentiated functional contributions⁵⁰.

Stratification thus manifests itself as a functional distribution of roles, structured among host states, framework states, and contributing Allies, whose contributions are different but complementary⁵¹. Eastern Flank states may play a central role in forward deterrence and the reception of allied forces; states with advanced military capabilities may act as providers of capabilities, command, or reinforcement, while others contribute through logistics, mobility, maritime assets, air defence, resilience, or industrial support. This diversity does not contradict allied solidarity but highlights once again the way in which it is practically organised, through a functional distribution of roles, in which the differences in contribution reflect the internal structure of cooperation and support its functioning.

Finally, the third dimension of stratification concerns the way in which differentiation

is institutionally integrated into the functioning of NATO. If threat perceptions explain its origins and role differentiation reflects its practical form, institutional adaptation shows how it is managed. At this level, differentiation is not merely tolerated but organised through planning, coordination, and allocation mechanisms.

This evolution opens the discussion about the contributions of Allies. Recent literature⁵² indicates a shift from meeting budgetary thresholds to the ability to translate resources into relevant capabilities and operational responsibilities. Differentiation does not disappear, but must be structured in a way that preserves decision-making capacity and military effectiveness. This logic is embedded in the NDPP, which allocates capability targets based on operational needs and national capacities. Following the Vilnius Summit, NATO adopted regional defence plans and a new *NATO Force Model*, which establish differentiated requirements in terms of forces, readiness, and interoperability⁵³. Analyses⁵⁴ show that these mechanisms do not standardise contributions, but integrate them into a common operational architecture.

The political dimension of this adaptation is reflected in the discourse of the Alliance's leadership. In 2026, Mark Rutte stressed the need for greater European responsibility in defence, including a stronger role within NATO⁵⁵. This positioning confirms the shift from a logic of burden-sharing to one of responsibility-sharing.

This dynamic is also reflected in initiatives aimed at managing strategic transition. Proposals for a *NATO Transition Planning Group* highlight the need for institutional coordination in redistributing responsibilities, especially in the context of the relative reduction of the US role in certain capability areas⁵⁶. Such a mechanism would support coordinated national efforts and help avoid capability gaps in the deterrence posture.

The specialised literature points to the development of flexible forms of cooperation, such as *capability clusters*, through which groups of states coordinate their efforts in specific domains⁵⁷. These formats should not be understood as manifestations leading to the

fragmentation of the Alliance, but as methods of adapting NATO to the need to integrate differentiated contributions into a coherent framework.

This trend in perceptions should also be viewed in the broader context of the fragmentation of the international order, which favours flexible arrangements and differentiated cooperation between states⁵⁸. NATO increasingly functions as a platform for coordinating heterogeneous contributions, rather than as a strictly uniform alliance. At the same time, studies on NATO cohesion show that unity is not automatic but depends on the institutional capacity to manage differences between states⁵⁹. As variations in perception and contribution persist, coordination mechanisms become essential for maintaining strategic coherence.

Stratification therefore does not remain merely an empirical outcome of differences among Allies, but is progressively integrated into NATO's functioning. In our view, the Alliance actively manages differentiation through regional plans, capability targets, coordination initiatives, and flexible cooperation formats.

Based on these findings, we propose a conceptual reframing of NATO, beyond interpretations that treat differentiation as a sign of fragmentation. The following section aims to analyse the Alliance as a stratified security regime, in which differentiated roles and contributions do not undermine cohesion, but constitute a condition for its functioning in a changing strategic environment.

4. NATO as a Stratified Security Regime: Differentiation and Cohesion

Understanding NATO as a stratified security regime does not aim to introduce a new theory of the Alliance, but rather to provide an interpretive framework for a reality that is already observable. Allies do not perceive threats in the same way, do not contribute uniformly, and do not assume identical roles; yet these differences are integrated within a common framework of collective defence. Stratification

can therefore be understood as a structural property of the Alliance's functioning, rather than as a departure from allied solidarity.

This interpretation remains consistent with the theory of international regimes already mentioned, insofar as regimes are defined by "*principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area*"⁶⁰. According to Krasner's theory, regimes are not merely temporary agreements, but arrangements that shape the behaviours and expectations of states over time⁶¹. Applied to NATO, this allows us to understand the Alliance not only as a military mechanism for collective defence, but also as an institutional structure in which differences in perception, contribution, and capacity are coordinated through common rules and procedures.

Viewed through this lens, stratification should not be confused with the logic of a *multi-level alliance*, a logic associated with established European conceptual traditions. Earlier debates introduced the notion of a *two-tier alliance*, which aimed precisely to highlight differences in contribution and risk-taking, but such a formula remains too rigid to capture NATO's current complexity. Even in the classic analysis of operations in Afghanistan⁶², differences among Allies did not take the form of a simple opposition between contributors and non-contributors, but reflected variation in type, intensity, and effective capacity to participate. Today, differentiation is more complex, encompassing flanks, capabilities, roles, responsibilities, and varying levels of strategic exposure.

An important element of this interpretation is the fact that allied solidarity cannot be reduced to quantitative indicators. The literature dedicated to the debate on *burden-sharing* shows that the assessment of member states' contributions cannot be limited to the level of defence spending relative to GDP, since this indicator does not sufficiently capture the capabilities delivered, the risks assumed, or the operational results. Contributions must also be analysed through political-technical criteria, such as the capabilities assigned by the NDPP, the level of training, operational contributions, and the flexibility of national commitments.

Such an approach allows allied solidarity to be understood as differentiated participation in a common effort, not as arithmetic equality of contributions⁶³.

At this stage, specialist analyses should focus on how these differences remain compatible with the functioning of the Alliance rather than on identifying already existing differences between Allies. The functioning of NATO indicates a nuanced logic: differences become problematic only when they are not recognised, coordinated, or integrated into a common planning framework. To the extent that they are assumed through common procedures, differentiation does not weaken solidarity but becomes one of the forms through which it is practically organised.

This observation is particularly relevant in relation to the new capability requirements. The specialist literature⁶⁴ shows us that the current pressure on NATO concerns not only increased spending, but also the ability to translate resources into credible forces and capabilities through the NDPP. The same analysis emphasises that the new *capability targets* are not distributed equally, and that the European Allies and Canada are to take on the main part of the increase in requirements, in the context of the relative reduction of the US role in European conventional deterrence. This does not indicate fragmentation, but rather that the redistribution of responsibilities is being embedded within NATO's planning architecture. Differentiation is thus translated into operational terms: not all Allies do the same, but their contributions are aligned with shared needs.

This logic also helps to clarify the relationship between differentiation and cohesion. Cohesion should not be understood as the absence of differences, but as the ability to coordinate politically and militarily despite them. According to the analyses, the Russian threat has had a unifying effect on NATO, but external factors are not sufficient to maintain cohesion in the long term. This is also influenced by institutions, norms, and leadership⁶⁵. For the purposes of this paper, this observation supports the idea that stratification can remain compatible with allied solidarity only if it is managed institutionally.

Pressures related to the US commitment reinforce this need for coordination. Recent studies on the potential threat of American withdrawal show that such signals can increase public support for defence spending, but they can also reduce trust in continued NATO co-operation and fuel preferences for national autonomy⁶⁶. This ambivalence shows that the redistribution of responsibilities is not only a technical issue, but also a political one. If left uncoordinated, it may reinforce perceptions of fragmentation; if integrated through common planning and rules, it can support adaptation.

This dynamic is also reflected in recent literature on NATO's transformation, which shows that the Alliance remains the primary guarantor of European security, while operating in an environment in which burden-sharing debates, political differences among Allies, and discussions on European strategic autonomy continue to exert pressure on internal cohesion. Allied responses to uncertainty regarding US engagement do not point to an automatic weakening of NATO, but rather to the need to adapt coordination mechanisms so that differences in contribution and responsibility do not evolve into strategic divisions.⁶⁷

At the same time, NATO operates in an international environment in which flexible forms of cooperation are becoming more frequent. The fragmentation of the international order and the growing relevance of regional and minilateral formats do not eliminate the role of alliances, but require the better integration of variable and specialised contributions. Recent analyses underline that the international system is becoming more fragmented, while regional cooperation and flexible arrangements are gaining importance⁶⁸. For NATO, this evolution should be understood not as an automatic weakening, but as pressure to adapt coordination mechanisms.

Interpreting NATO as a stratified security regime therefore allows for a measured reading of internal differentiation. It does not transform differences among Allies into formal hierarchies, nor does it call into question NATO's role as the primary framework for collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic area. Rather, it explains how an extended alliance, facing diverse threats and unevenly distributed

resources, maintains its functionality through rules, procedures, and coordination mechanisms that enable different forms of participation towards a shared objective.

Conclusions

Recent developments in the international security environment, marked by the return of great-power competition and mounting pressure on the international order, have brought alliances back to the forefront as mechanisms for organising strategic cooperation. So, NATO remains the principal institutional framework for collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic area, yet the way it functions internally has become increasingly relevant for understanding allied cohesion. This analysis started from this premise and sought to explain how allied solidarity operates in practice under conditions of persistent differences among member states.

The research problem addressed the co-existence of the uniform normative character of solidarity and its differentiated functional manifestations. The central hypothesis was that such differentiation does not indicate fragmentation of the Alliance, but reflects a structural and adaptive feature of its functioning. The findings confirm this hypothesis. Differences among Allies, whether related to threat perceptions, types of contributions, or assumed responsibilities, do not appear as dysfunctions, but as elements integrated into the architecture of allied cooperation.

First, variations in threat perception, particularly across the Alliance's different flanks, show that member states do not operate within an identical strategic environment. NATO nonetheless manages these differences through institutional mechanisms that allow distinct priorities to coexist. Cognitive differentiation does not lead to strategic divergence, but to the configuration of complementary forms of participation in collective security.

Second, the distribution of roles and contributions confirms that allied solidarity is not achieved through uniformity. The analysis has shown that collective defence operates through a logic of complementarity, in which states contribute differently, according to their

capabilities, geographical positioning, and political options. This distribution does not imply a formal hierarchy, but a functional organisation of contributions. In this sense, the debate on *burden-sharing* must be understood beyond quantitative indicators, as the level of defence spending does not adequately reflect the complexity of allied contributions. Their assessment involves considering the capabilities delivered, operational participation and the risks assumed, which supports the idea that solidarity can be differentiated without being diminished.

Third, the analysis shows that differentiation is not confined to the empirical level, but is increasingly integrated into the institutional functioning of the Alliance. Planning processes, new regional defence plans, and capability coordination mechanisms indicate NATO's adaptation to the need to manage heterogeneous contributions. The differentiated allocation of capability requirements and the development of flexible forms of cooperation show that differentiation is organised rather than eliminated. At the same time, allied responses to external pressures, including uncertainties regarding US commitment, confirm that these dynamics influence the strategic behaviour of member states, leading both to increased national defence efforts and to adjustments in forms of cooperation within the Alliance⁶⁹.

These findings support the interpretation of NATO as a stratified security regime, in which differentiation is structured on several interdependent levels and integrated into a common institutional framework. Accordingly, stratification does not represent a deviation from the alliance model, but as a form of organising cooperation in a strategic environment characterised by diversity and uncertainty. Allied solidarity is not invalidated by differences, but is implemented through variable forms of participation in the same collective objective.

In relation to the current debates on the risk of fragmentation of the Alliance, this interpretation offers an alternative perspective. Differences among Allies, pressures on the distribution of contributions, or the emergence of flexible cooperation formats do not necessarily signal an erosion of cohesion but reflect NATO's adaptation to a changing international

environment. In this context, the institutional capacity to manage differentiation becomes an essential factor in maintaining strategic coherence.

Therefore, the main conclusion of the paper is that stratification represents a structural feature of NATO, allowing for the reconciliation of normative solidarity with the diversity of allied contributions. Rather than undermining the functioning of the Alliance, differentiation helps it adapt, providing a framework through which states can participate in collective security in different but coordinated ways. In this sense, NATO does not function despite the differences between Allies, but through its ability to integrate them into a coherent system of cooperation.

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The Mutual Assistance Clause of the Treaty of Nancy and the Problem of Trust Formation in Franco-Polish Relations

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Abstract

The Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship between the Republic of Poland and the French Republic, signed in Nancy on 9 May 2025 and entering into force on 22 January 2026, marked a significant deepening of bilateral relations. Concluded against the background of acute threats to European security generated by the war in Ukraine, the treaty establishes a comprehensive framework for bilateral cooperation, including in the area of security and defence; among the provisions concerning this area, the mutual assistance clause in case of armed aggression was singled out by the signatories of the treaty as the most consequential provision. As the logic of the treaty and the statements of its signatories suggest, the force of this clause stems not merely from its formal statement but from its grounding in the mutual trust built through a long history of Franco-Polish solidarity and, no less importantly, through the honest acknowledgment of major failures along the way. The paper proceeds in three stages. The first section outlines the reasons for the commitment of both parties to the treaty, rooted in current geopolitical realities as well as in enduring principles of their respective foreign policies. The second analyses the mutual assistance clause in the context of the treaty's broader defence provisions and assesses its added value for Franco-Polish relations. The third examines how shared history and mutual trust bear on the credibility of the mutual assistance clause, and to this end it draws on the text of the treaty, statements by its signatories, and scholarly literature on the relationship between trust, history, and defence commitments.

Keywords: Treaty of Nancy, mutual assistance, trust in international relations, history of Franco-Polish relations, European security

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The Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship between the Republic of Poland and the French Republic (Treaty of Nancy)¹, signed on 9 May 2025 in the French city of Nancy, was heralded as both an upgrade in bilateral relations and a necessary adaptation to the geopolitical changes currently affecting European security². The treaty, which entered into force on 22 January 2026³, replaces the Treaty of Friendship and Solidarity between the French Republic and the Republic of Poland, signed in Paris on 9 April 1991⁴, and is designed both to broaden the scope of bilateral relations and to deepen their defence dimension, notably through the inclusion of a mutual assistance clause. The implication of this clause in terms of trust between France and Poland provides the essence of this paper, whose structure is threefold. The first section examines the reasons why France and Poland entered into the Treaty of Nancy; the second one analyses the mutual assistance clause

enshrined in the treaty; and the final section explores how the Franco-Polish historical experience bears on the trusting relationship between the two states and, in turn, on the credibility of that commitment.

1. Rationales Underpinning the Conclusion of the Treaty

Analyses of the treaty emphasised that a convergence of key interests prompted France and Poland to conclude the Treaty of Nancy. The profound deterioration of European security since 2022, as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine, together with the return of Donald Trump to power in 2025, which revived concerns about a possible weakening of the US commitment to European security, was a major factor drawing France and Poland closer together.⁵ A further relevant factor was a degree of ideological and political affinity between Macron and Tusk, which became particularly visible in the run-up to the first round of Poland's presidential election scheduled for 18 May 2025.⁶

In this broader context, France may be seen as having regarded the treaty as a means of opening opportunities for its defence industry to benefit from the massive investments Poland intended to make in the defence sector⁷, while at the same time relying on Poland in the pursuit of its eastward strategic reorientation within Europe⁸; this strategic pivot was intended to enhance France's influence over security developments in Central and Eastern Europe, in response to the region's growing importance for European security⁹. It was argued that the Treaty of Nancy should be seen less as a visionary French initiative or a strategic breakthrough than as an adjustment to Poland's rising economic and military weight in Europe¹⁰, and thus as a reactive rather than a proactive move in French foreign policy. The economic ascendancy of Poland was confirmed by the projections for 2025, which placed it as the sixth-largest economy in the European Union, behind Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, while also indicating that Poland benefited from the lowest unemployment rate

in the EU and was expected to overtake Japan in GDP *per capita* at purchasing power parity¹¹. In military terms, Poland had assumed since 2022 as a paramount objective the development of the largest land forces in Europe, and by 2024 the size of the Polish Armed Forces already slightly surpassed that of the French military, placing Poland third within NATO in terms of military size¹².

At the same time, Poland appears to have viewed the treaty as an opportunity to enhance its standing in European politics by securing recognition as an equal partner of an established Western power¹³, especially since France had previously concluded comparable bilateral treaties only with Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and preparations were already underway for a further upgrading of its bilateral defence and security cooperation with the United Kingdom¹⁴. Moreover, the Treaty of Nancy enabled it to position itself for leadership in Central and Eastern Europe¹⁵. The political orientation of Poland towards both Western and Eastern Europe could be said to reflect the Giedroyc–Mieroszewski doctrine developed during the Cold War in the Paris journal *Kultura* by two Polish intellectuals in exile, Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski, which substantially shaped Poland's post-communist foreign policy¹⁶. The doctrine called for Poland to be well embedded in Western Europe to enjoy great-power support, including for adhering to a non-revisionist stance, but also for it to act towards preserving the independence of its neighbours, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belorussia¹⁷—which at that time were part of the Soviet Union—as a buffer zone in the eventuality of the dissolution of the Soviet Union¹⁸. This doctrine, abbreviated as ULB from the names of the three neighbouring states, was heralded in the context of the war in Ukraine as doctrinally grounding the strong support given by Poland to Ukraine to resist the Russian Federation; thus, during a visit to Warsaw in April 2023, Volodimir Zelensky stated that “Just a few generations ago, everything on which our power is now based was just a task. Jerzy Giedroyc taught that ‘there is no independent Poland without an independent Ukraine.’ This is learned”¹⁹. Poland's drive to secure strong relations with France is also

broadly consonant with the view of Zbigniew Brzezinski, who exercised a notable influence on Poland's accession to NATO²⁰, that "Poland is too weak to be a geostrategic player, and it has only one option: to become integrated into the West"²¹.

2. The Mutual Assistance Clause as the Core Treaty Commitment

The Treaty of Friendship and Solidarity concluded in 1991 between France and Poland included the issue of peace and security, with the two states assuming the commitment to contribute to the maintenance of peace and security in Europe (Articles 2, 3), especially within the framework of the then Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)²². Moreover, the treaty provided for bilateral consultations whenever either party considered that a threat to peace, a breach of peace, or a threat to its essential security interests had arisen; in such circumstances, the parties were to endeavour to adopt a common position on the appropriate means for addressing the situation (Article 4).

The issue of security and defence is addressed on a broad scale in the Treaty of Nancy (Article 4)²³. Herein, the Franco-Polish defence cooperation is framed as an integrated strategic arrangement combining political coordination, operational preparedness, industrial collaboration, and European as well as Euro-Atlantic security objectives. The Treaty of Nancy establishes regular high-level consultations as a means of promoting continuity, strategic convergence, and more closely aligned positions on defence-related issues, while also seeking to translate that coordination into practical military effect through greater interoperability, joint activities, personnel exchanges, and the facilitation of force movement and presence. At the same time, it links bilateral cooperation to broader goals in armaments, innovation, and defence-industrial development, including the strengthening of both national capacities and the wider European defence, technological, and industrial base. This bilateral agenda is explicitly situated

within the complementary frameworks of the European Union and NATO, and it extends to areas such as hybrid threats, cyber defence, disinformation, intelligence-sharing, advanced military education, and strategic foresight.

A key aspect of the defence dimension of the Treaty of Nancy is the mutual assistance clause (Article 4.2), which reads as follows: "In accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, in the event of an armed aggression against their territories, the Parties shall assist each other, including by military means. Such aid and assistance shall be implemented in accordance with the commitments arising from Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and paragraph 7 of Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union". This provision was regarded as the central element of the treaty by both the prime minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, who explicitly called it "the very essence of this treaty"²⁴, and the president of France, Emmanuel Macron, who spotlighted it as the treaty's key message²⁵. It is also illustrative for the paramount importance attached to this clause the fact that it is the first to be mentioned in the presentation of the treaty posted on the website of the Polish Government²⁶. The prominence of the mutual assistance clause among the provisions of the treaty was likewise underscored by correspondents from major media organisations such as *Reuters*, *Le Monde*, *France 24*, and *TF1*.²⁷ Macron underlined the complementarity of the Treaty of Nancy with both the North Atlantic Treaty and the Treaty on European Union (TEU), presenting the treaty's own mutual assistance clause not as a substitute for either framework, but as a bilateral provision that gives a more concrete and credible expression to the collective-defence commitment enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the mutual-assistance obligation laid down in Article 42(7) of the TEU. It is worth noting that Macron himself referred to the mutual assistance clause in the Treaty of Nancy in varying terms—as a mutual defence and assistance clause and as a clause of solidarity²⁸—and that commentators have designated this provision as a defence and mutual assistance clause²⁹ or as a military assistance clause³⁰.

Despite its prominent status, the mutual assistance clause attracted criticism on the part of various experts who emphasised that it did not create additional commitments for Poland and France, but only asserted legal obligations already incumbent upon them under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and Article 42(7) of the Lisbon Treaty³¹. Consequently, it was indicated that France assumed to act towards Poland as a UN, NATO and EU member and not as a special partner for Poland with respect to defence against aggression³². Moreover, it was argued that the force of this clause was diminished by the absence of any reference to the establishment on Polish soil of a permanent French military presence, a move that would clearly give consistency to the determination of France to defend Poland,³³ but even more so by the lack of any connection with the France's nuclear deterrent capability, which, nevertheless, is found in similar treaties that France has with the United Kingdom (2010) and Germany (2019)³⁴. The treaty concluded with the United Kingdom explicitly establishes that threats to the vital interests of the United Kingdom necessarily threaten the vital interests of France³⁵ and the treaty with Germany asserts that the security interests of the two states are inseparable³⁶. These provisions must be read in the light of French nuclear deterrence doctrine, which holds that nuclear weapons are intended to protect the state's vital interests, the precise meaning of which is determined by the president of the Republic; beginning with Jacques Chirac back in 1996³⁷, and up to Emmanuel Macron³⁸, French presidents have constantly asserted the existence of a European dimension of the French vital interests³⁹. Criticism of the wording of the mutual assistance clause should be qualified by noting that Emmanuel Macron declared that France's vital interests extend to those of its partners, including Poland.⁴⁰ Within the framework of the traditional ambiguity maintained by France regarding the possible use of its nuclear forces, that assertion represented the strongest stance ever taken by a French president with regard to the security of Poland.⁴¹ A further qualification follows from the recalibration of French nuclear doctrine announced by Emmanuel Macron

on 2 March 2026, ten months after the signing of the Nancy Treaty⁴². While preserving the established foundations of French nuclear doctrine (exclusive national control over any decision to use nuclear weapons, sovereign discretion in defining France's vital interests, a defensive understanding of deterrence, rejection of nuclear war as a managed or graduated process, and the retention of a one-off warning mechanism intended to preserve a final chance to restore deterrence), Macron introduced the idea of forward deterrence, under which France's European partners, including Poland, may participate in deterrence exercises and may potentially host the temporary deployment of elements of the French strategic air forces. At the same time, he made clear that this evolving posture was intended to provide strategic reassurance rather than a formal security guarantee.

Returning to Macron's discourse from 9 May 2025, he emphasised therein, with respect to the use of conventional forces for Poland's defence, the French Armed Forces capacity for rapid deployment in the event of Russian aggression, as demonstrated in Romania in 2022⁴³. However, given that the French Army currently requires six months to deploy a division of 19,000 troops and 7,000 vehicles and aims to reduce this period to one month by 2027, the strategic importance of stationing significant French forces on Polish soil cannot be denied⁴⁴. The Treaty of Nancy, provides, nevertheless, for the armed forces of the two countries to conduct joint exercises, missions, and deployments in regions that bear security relevance for them (Article 4), including, as Macron indicated, in areas from Poland⁴⁵.

It should be noted that criticism of the mutual assistance clause is framed from the perspective of what France offers to Poland, thereby implying that Poland has no significant role in France's defence and that the bilateral relationship is, as a result, markedly asymmetric in defence matters. This interpretation was addressed by Donald Tusk, who, at the press conference following the signing of the Treaty of Nancy, underscored the mutual nature of the clause and noted that, as Poland is building Europe's largest army, it is a highly valuable ally⁴⁶.

It has been remarked that, for Poland, the real added value of the treaty in the field of mutual defence lies mainly in psychological factors, namely the deterrent effect on a would-be aggressor created by the perception that France is genuinely prepared to defend Poland, including by military means⁴⁷.

3. The Credibility of the Mutual Assistance Clause and the Interplay of Trust and History in Franco-Polish Relations

The Treaty of Nancy may be interpreted as mobilising the nexus between shared history and mutual trust in support of the credibility—and, by extension, the deterrent potential—of the mutual assistance clause it enshrines.

The shared history of the two states and peoples occupies a prominent place in the structure of the Treaty of Nancy, which opens by recalling that, over the centuries, a deep sense of solidarity developed between them, laying the foundations for a brotherhood in arms and for standing together against totalitarianism. This idea is expressed again later in the treaty, where it is stated that “the Parties attach particular importance to the history that unites the two States and the two peoples” (Article 12.2). The official presentation of the treaty by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs likewise emphasises the shared and long-standing history of Franco-Polish relations.⁴⁸

In the speeches delivered by Emmanuel Macron and Donald Tusk at the treaty-signing ceremony in Nancy, historical considerations equally played an important role. Thus, Macron recalled at the beginning of his speech the reign of Henry of Valois in Poland and subsequently in France in the 16th century, as well as the significant cultural heritage left to the city of Nancy in the 18th century by Stanislas Leszczyński, a king of Poland who later became duke of Lorraine⁴⁹. He also referred to the economic and social benefits generated by mass Polish migration to France during the interwar period, as well as to the cultural and educational support extended by France

to Poland in the final years of communist rule. Macron did not avoid referring to regrettable historical episodes that marked the history of relations between the two countries. Towards the end of his speech, he recalled that France failed to take decisive military action in defence of Poland after the German attack of September 1939 and did not firmly oppose, in 1947, the subjection of Central Europe to Soviet control. For his part, Tusk likewise invoked the history of Franco-Polish relations, recalling that Gdańsk evokes both the memory of the German aggression that was not met at the outset with sufficiently resolute resistance from the Western powers and reminding that Nancy and Lorraine evoke the historical legacy of King Stanisław Leszczyński's relocation from Poland; he also referred to the support extended by the French people in the 1980s to those in Poland resisting communist rule⁵⁰. Tusk further argued that the early failures of the Second World War retained a formative significance, since the inclusion in the Treaty of Nancy of a clear mutual defence clause—one that had been lacking at that time—demonstrates France's capacity to learn from past failures.

Turning to the issue of trust, the academic literature recognises that the conclusion of international treaties—and all the more so of prominent ones—presupposes the existence of trust between the parties⁵¹. Scholars likewise acknowledge that bilateral treaties bearing on defence require a significant pre-existing degree of trust, given the sensitive implications such treaties entail for national security⁵². On these grounds, the presence in the Treaty of Nancy of defence provisions amounting to a mutual defence clause may be taken as evidence that Franco-Polish relations had already attained a high level of trust. To paraphrase the characterisation given by the Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating, to the 1995 Australia–Indonesia defence agreement, the Treaty of Nancy may likewise be seen as a declaration of trust⁵³. At the same time, precisely because of its significant defence dimension, the Treaty of Nancy should also be understood as an instrument of trust-building, sustaining and deepening the trust already achieved by the time of its signing.⁵⁴

The close connection between trust and history is well recognised in the scholarship on trust in international relations, cutting across different theoretical approaches to the subject. It can be identified, in particular, in both rationalist and constructivist accounts of trust, which, despite their divergent ontological premises, converge on the significance of historical experience for the formation of interstate trust. Thus, in his influential analysis of trust from a rational choice theory perspective, Andrew H. Kydd considers trust as the “belief that the other side prefers mutual cooperation to exploiting one’s own cooperation”⁵⁵ and defines the level of trust an actor places in another in terms of the probability it assigns to that other actor’s trustworthiness⁵⁶. Kydd argues that a state’s probabilistic assessment of another state’s degree of trustworthiness significantly depends on whether the historical record, particularly in a bilateral context, suggests that the latter has exploited cooperation extended to it rather than reciprocating it. However, Kydd acknowledges that probabilistic inference grounded in history is complicated where the historical record encompasses both cooperative and hostile episodes, yielding a mixed or ambiguous signal; a case in point is that of the Soviet Union at the onset of the Cold War, which had to assess the trustworthiness of Britain and the United States against the background, on the one hand, of their military intervention in support of the White forces during the Russian Civil War and, on the other, of the substantial support later received from them in the war against Nazi Germany.⁵⁷ It should be noted that, in Kydd’s theoretical framework, states are modelled as belonging to one of two types: security seeking states, which possess Assurance Game preferences and prefer mutual cooperation provided the other side reciprocates, and expansionist states, which possess Prisoner’s Dilemma preferences and prefer to exploit the other side’s cooperation⁵⁸. Consequently, under Kydd’s ontological assumptions, history can supply increasingly refined information from which inferences about a state’s type may be drawn, but cannot, through the interactive process it records, constitute or transform that type—which is precisely why “type”, not “identity”,

remains the operative analytical category in his framework. As Kydd’s discussion of the Soviet shift under Gorbachev suggests, a state’s preference structure may change; yet such change is not conceived as a product of the interactive process through which trust is built or eroded, but as originating in domestic political transformation, that is, in causes endogenous to the state but exogenous to the model of interaction⁵⁹.

Alexander Wendt, who laid the foundation for the constructivist theory of international relations, argued that the formation of collective identity among states depends on the resolution of what he termed the fundamental problem of trust: the need for states to believe that, should they engage in a process of identification with a group, their particular interests will not be disregarded and their distinctiveness as individual actors will be preserved rather than absorbed into the collective⁶⁰ (Wendt, 1999, pp. 357-358). The mechanism through which this trust is generated, Wendt argued, is self-restraint—the disposition of states to accept self-imposed limitations on the demands they place upon others within a group, thereby signalling that they do not seek to diminish the particular interests and distinctiveness of fellow members in the name of collective purposes. Wendt’s concept of collective identity does not entail the dissolution of individual identities into an undifferentiated common one; rather, it presupposes their preservation. What changes in the process of collective identity formation is not the specificity of each state, but the terms on which that specificity is maintained: states move from a purely self-regarding orientation, in which the interests of others are treated as external constraints, to a prosocial orientation, in which those interests acquire standing alongside their own.⁶¹

Among the pathways through which states may come to know that others are genuinely self-restraining, Wendt includes one that extends over a long-time period⁶². He maintains that it unfolds through a process that is necessarily reciprocal: a state’s self-limitation can be sustained over time only if it is met by corresponding self-limitation on the part of others, since unreciprocated restraint will eventually be abandoned. Reciprocity is thus not itself

the evidence from which trust is inferred, but rather the condition that sustains the process of self-limitation over a period long enough for such an inference to become possible. Through prolonged cycles of reciprocated self-restraint, what begins as externally motivated or strategically calculated conformity with shared norms is gradually transformed into an internalised disposition—a habitual pattern of conduct that no longer depends on the expectation of specific returns. It is at this point that the inference of trustworthiness becomes available to the observing state: by noting that the other's adherence to shared norms has become consistent and is not accompanied by discursive contestation in its foreign policy, a state may conclude that the other's self-limitation reflects a genuine commitment rather than a tactical posture that might be reversed when circumstances change. The inference of trustworthiness is therefore inherently historical in a double sense: it depends both on the accumulation of behavioural evidence across a long temporal horizon and on the qualitative transformation that this very duration makes possible—the passage from calculated compliance to ingrained disposition, which only sustained reciprocity over time can produce.

Approaching the issue of trust in a constructivist framework, Vincent Charles Keating and Jan Ruzicka⁶³ offer what amounts to an operationalisation of the process that Wendt theorises at a higher level of abstraction. They argue that the most reliable indicator of a trusting relationship between states is their progressive refusal to adopt, or their gradual removal of most or all existing hedging strategies over an extended period of time⁶⁴. The two authors emphasise that only by conceiving the “development of a trusting relationship as a long-term historical process”⁶⁵ is it possible to capture the habitual character of trust at the international level and to distinguish genuine trust from its merely apparent forms.⁶⁶

Conclusions

The mutual assistance clause included in the Treaty of Nancy lends itself to examination through the lens of a well-established connec-

tion in scholarly literature: that between trust and shared historical experience. The long arc of Franco-Polish relations is explicitly invoked both in the text of the agreement and in the statements of its signatories, while the defence provisions of the treaty, especially the mutual assistance clause, presuppose the existence of a high degree of mutual confidence. The temporal scope of these references is remarkably broad, spanning more than four centuries, and the record they encompass is decidedly mixed, comprising episodes of genuine solidarity but also moments when high expectations of support went unfulfilled, chief among the latter being France's failure to come to Poland's defence in 1939. Such a mixed record is to be expected of any bilateral relationship surveyed over a long temporal arc, yet it could considerably complicate the emergence of trust in bilateral relations. The discursive logic of the two leaders suggests, however, a possible solution: genuinely acknowledging responsibility for past failures, and having that acknowledgment accepted by the other party, transforms the meaning of adverse episodes from evidence of unreliability into evidence of honesty and accountability, attributes capable of sustaining trust rather than undermining it. In the framing of both Macron and Tusk, France's willingness to accept responsibility not only for the 1939 episode but also for Poland's subsequent fall under Soviet domination grounds a trusting relationship between Poland and France and, consequently, provides credibility to the mutual assistance clause. The approach to trust-building advanced by the two leaders draws on a shared historical record and, in that respect, resonates with themes highlighted in the work of Kydd, Wendt, and Vincent Charles Keating and Jan Ruzicka. At the same time, however, it goes beyond these accounts by introducing an ethical reinterpretation of past failures as a means of qualitatively transforming the meaning of the historical record itself. The conclusion of the Treaty of Nancy thus suggests that, if historical memory is to sustain the formation of trust, it cannot function merely as a record of events; it must also involve their ethical interpretation in such a way that past failures yield lessons rather than simply precedents. Furthermore, the

acknowledgement of the existence of a deep solidarity between Poland and France amounting to an identity at the level of their vital interests may also be read as pointing towards a constructivist logic of the emergence of a common identity. It should be noted, however, that the admission of past failures, however sincere, cannot by itself guarantee the credibility of present commitments. Whether the trust expressed in the Treaty of Nancy proves to be well founded, ultimately depends on the extent to which the mutual assistance clause is sustained over time by concrete implementing measures.

Notes

¹ *Traité pour une coopération et une amitié renforcées entre la République de Pologne et la République française*, 9 May 2025, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2025/05/09/traite-pour-une-cooperation-et-une-amitie-renforcees-entre-la-republique-de-pologne-et-la-republique-francaise>, accessed on 13.03.2026.

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³ Journal Officiel de la République Française, No. 0022 of 27 January 2026, Décret n° 2026-25 du 23 janvier 2026 portant publication du traité pour une coopération et une amitié renforcées entre la République française et la République de Pologne, signé à Nancy le 9 mai 2025 (1), https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000053403284?utm_source, accessed on 12.03.2026; Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Republic of Poland, Poland hands over instrument of ratification of Nancy Treaty*, 23.12.2025, https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/poland-hands-over-instrument-of-ratification-of-nancy-treaty?utm_source, accessed on 23.03.2026.

⁴ *Traité d'amitié et de solidarité entre la République Française et la République de Pologne*, 9 April 1991, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000711507>, https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/poland-hands-over-instrument-of-ratification-of-nancy-treaty?utm_source, accessed on 23.03.2026.

⁵ Louise Souverbie, *Nancy Treaty: Towards a strategic and security reinforcement of Franco-Polish relations*; Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.* Francis Brochet, *Traité France-Pologne: pourquoi sera-t-il signé à Nancy et à quoi va-t-il servir?*, 7 May 2025, <https://www.estrepublicain.fr/politique/2025/05/02/rattraper-le-temps-perdu-a-quoi-va-servir-le-traite-d-amitie-entre-la-france-et-la-pologne>, accessed on 18.03.2026; Cyrille Bret, *Poland and France, towards a promising reset?*, 27 June 2025, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2025/06/27/poland-and-france-towards-a-promising-reset/>, accessed on 15.03.2026.

⁶ Cyrille Bret, *Poland and France, towards a promising reset?*

⁷ Amanda Dziubińska, Artur Kacprzyk, *Poland and France Sign Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship*; Cyrille Bret, *Poland and France, towards a promising reset?*

⁸ Élie Tenenbaum, with the collaboration of Amélie Zima, *Return to the East: the Russian Threat and the French Pivot to Europe's Eastern Flank*, Focus stratégique, No. 119, The French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), June 2024, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/ifri_tenenbaum_zima_return_to_the_east_2024_0.pdf, accessed on 13.03.2026; Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

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¹⁰ Cyrille Bret, *Poland and France, towards a promising reset?*

¹¹ Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*; EUROSTAT, *Eurostatistics - data for short-term economic analysis*, 20 August 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Eurostatistics_-_data_for_short-term_economic_analysis&utm, accessed on 22.03.2026.

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¹³ Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

¹⁴ Louise Souverbie, *Nancy Treaty: Towards a strategic and security reinforcement of Franco-Polish relations*; Amanda Dziubińska, Artur Kacprzyk, *Poland and France Sign Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship*.

¹⁵ Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

¹⁶ Piotr Maciej Kaczyński, *Poland's shifting positions on the future of the European Union: deepening and widening?*, p. 7, Casimir Pulaski Foundation, Warsaw, 2024, <https://pulaski.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Poland-shifting-positions-on-the-future-of-the-European-Union-deepening-and-widening.pdf>, 18.03.2026.

¹⁷ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, pp. 217–222, Yale University Press, 2003; Andrzej Brzeziecki, *Giedroyc – man of the east*, <https://kulturoparyska.com/en/search/searched-article/8/9296/folder>, accessed on 17.03.2026.

¹⁸ Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

¹⁹ President of Ukraine, *Russia cannot win in Europe when a Ukrainian and a Pole stand side by side - speech by the President of Ukraine before the deputies of both chambers of the National Assembly, representatives of the public of Ukraine and Poland*, 5 April 2023, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/rosiyi-ne-vigrati-u-yevropi-koli-ukrayinec-i-polyak-stoyat-p-82125>, accessed on 12.03.2026.

²⁰ Ryszard Zięba, “The 20th Anniversary of Poland’s Accession to NATO”, p. 204 in Daniel S. Hamilton, Kristina Spohr (eds.), *Open Door: NATO and Euro-Atlantic Security after the Cold War*, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 2019.

²¹ Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*; Zbigniew Brzeziński, *The Grand Chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*, p. 43, Basic Books, 1997.

²² *Traité d'amitié et de solidarité entre la République Française et la République Française et la République de Pologne*, 9 April 1991.

²³ See also Louise Souverbie, *Nancy Treaty: Towards a strategic and security reinforcement of Franco-Polish relations*.

²⁴ *Le Monde*, *France, Poland seal alliance with a strategic treaty*, 9 May 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2025/05/09/france-poland-to-seal-alliance-with-strategic-treaty_6741086_7.html, accessed on 22.03.2026.

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²⁸ The Presidency of the Republic, *Conférence de presse du Président de la République avec le Premier ministre polonais Donald Tusk à Nancy*.

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³⁰ Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

³¹ Louise Souverbie, *Nancy Treaty: Towards a strategic and security reinforcement of Franco-Polish relations*; Amanda Dziubińska, Artur Kacprzyk, *Poland and France Sign Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship*; Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.* On the relationship between the provisions of NATO Article 5 and those of Article 42(7) from the Treaty on European Union, see Federica Fazio, *The EU's Mutual Defence Clause: Legal and Strategic Considerations on Article 42(7) TEU in Light of the War in Ukraine*, *Nordic Journal of European Law*, vol. 8, No. 3, 2025, pp. 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.36969/njel.v8i3.28035>; Sebastian Clapp and Anne Verhelst, *A comparative analysis of Article 5 Washington Treaty (NATO) and Article 42(7) TEU*

(EU), European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 739.250, December 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/739250/EPRS_ATA\(2022\)739250_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/739250/EPRS_ATA(2022)739250_EN.pdf), and Andreea-Loredana Tudor, *How can the EU contribute to deterrence and defence in Europe? Revision of the EU Strategic Compass or Reconceptualization of the EU-NATO relationship?*, Strategic Leadership Journal, Challenges for Geopolitics and Organizational Development, Special Issue, 2025, pp. 13-22.

³² Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

³³ Louise Souverbie, *Nancy Treaty: Towards a strategic and security reinforcement of Franco-Polish relations*; Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

³⁴ Amanda Dziubińska, Artur Kacprzyk, *Poland and France Sign Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship*; Louise Souverbie, *Nancy Treaty: Towards a strategic and security reinforcement of Franco-Polish relations*; Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

³⁵ *Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation*, London, 2 November 2010, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c24a0ed915d1b3a307ae9/7976.pdf>, accessed on 14.03.2026. The preamble of the treaty contains the following provision: "Bearing in mind that they do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either Party could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened".

³⁶ *Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on Franco-German Cooperation and Integration*, Article 4, 22 January 2019, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/19-0232-1900417_en_fin_reinschrift_ws_aa105-og_ck_010219_cle079d7b.pdf, accessed on 14.03.2026.

³⁷ La Présidence de la République, *Discours de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, sur la réforme de la défense française, la mise en place de l'architecture de défense européenne, la restructuration des industries d'armement et la limitation des armements nucléaires et conventionnels*, Paris, 8 June 1996, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-8448-fr.pdf>, accessed on 14.03.2026. Chirac asserted that "the European dimension is also present in our nuclear deterrence" on grounds of "growing intertwining of our vital interests".

³⁸ La Présidence de la République, *Discours du Président Emmanuel Macron sur la stratégie de défense et de dissuasion devant les stagiaires de la 27ème promotion de l'école de guerre*, 7 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron>

/2020/02/07/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-sur-la-strategie-de-defense-et-de-dissuasion-devant-les-stagiaires-de-la-27eme-promotion-de-lecole-de-guerre?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed on 12.03.2026. Here he outlined that "Our nuclear forces play a distinct deterrent role, particularly in Europe. By their very existence, they strengthen Europe's security and, in that regard, have an authentically European dimension (...). Let us be clear: the vital interests of France now have an European dimension". See also La Présidence de la République, *Discours du Président de la République sur l'Europe à la Sorbonne*, 25 April 2024, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/04/24/discours-sur-leurope>, accessed on 12.03.2026.

³⁹ Emmanuelle Maitre, *The French nuclear deterrent in a changing strategic environment*, pp. 1-2, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), FRS Note No. 04/2025, 11 March 2025, <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/notes/2025/042025.pdf>, accessed on 11.03.2026.

⁴⁰ La Présidence de la République, *Conférence de presse du Président de la République avec le Premier ministre polonais Donald Tusk à Nancy*, 9 May 2025, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2025/05/09/signature-du-traite-damitie-franco-polonais-a-nancy>, accessed on 12.03.2026.

⁴¹ Amanda Dziubińska, Artur Kacprzyk, *Poland and France Sign Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship*.

⁴² La Présidence de la République, *Discours du président de la République sur la dissuasion nucléaire de la France*, 2 March 2026, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-26067-fr.pdf>, 12.03.2026. See also Jonathan Rosenstein, Emily Cheesman, *What Macron's changes to French nuclear policy mean for European security*, 4 March 2026, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/what-macrons-changes-to-french-nuclear-policy-mean-for-european-security/>, accessed on 13.03.2026; Darya Dolzikova, Héloïse Fayet, *Macron Offers a Promising Vision for Nuclear Deterrence in Europe*, 11 March 2026, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/macron-offers-promising-vision-nuclear-deterrence-europe>, accessed on 13.03.2026; Nick Witney, *Under my parapluie: Macron's nuclear guarantee for Europe*, 17 March 2026, <https://ecfr.eu/article/under-my-parapluie-macrons-nuclear-guarantee-for-europe/>, accessed on 12.04.2026.

⁴³ La Présidence de la République, *Conférence de presse du Président de la République avec le Premier ministre polonais Donald Tusk à Nancy*.

⁴⁴ Ministère des Armées et des Anciens combattants, *How is the French Army changing?*, 1 January 2025, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/en/news/how-french-army-changing>; Pierre Néron-Bancel, *Transformation de l'armée de Terre. Que signifie la réorganisation «vers une armée de Terre de combat»?*, IFRI, 20 February 2025, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/ifri_neron-bancel_transformation_armee_terre_2025.pdf, accessed on 06.03.2026; Amanda Dziubińska, Artur Kacprzyk, *Poland and France Sign Treaty on Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship*.

⁴⁵ Replying to a journalist who asked if the Treaty of Nancy provides for the conduct of joint Franco-German military exercises in Poland, Macron stated that “we will conduct joint exercises between our armed forces in the coming months” (La Présidence de la République, *Conférence de presse du Président de la République avec le Premier ministre polonais Donald Tusk à Nancy*).

⁴⁶ Présidence de la République, *Signature du traité d'amitié franco-polonais à Nancy et conférence de presse avec Donald Tusk*, 09.05.2025, <https://www.youtube.com/live/rEVnPAJiSHk?si=WLAYy-ZLFx4Mp8m>, accessed on 13.02.2026.

⁴⁷ Maciej Filip Bukowski, *art. cit.*

⁴⁸ Le Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, *Le Traité de Nancy: pour une coopération et une amitié renforcées entre la France et la Pologne*, 9 May 2025, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/pologne/evenements/article/le-traite-de-nancy-pour-une-cooperation-et-une-amitie-renforcees-entre-la>, accessed on 05.03.2026.

⁴⁹ La Présidence de la République, *Conférence de presse du Président de la République avec le Premier ministre polonais Donald Tusk à Nancy*.

⁵⁰ Présidence de la République, *Signature du traité d'amitié franco-polonais à Nancy et conférence de presse avec Donald Tusk*.

⁵¹ Jan Ruzicka, Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The puzzle of trusting relationships in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty*, p. 70, *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 1, 2010, pp. 69-85.

⁵² For an analysis of the connection between bilateral defence cooperation agreements and trust between the parties, see Brandon J. Kinne, *Defense Cooperation Agreements and the Emergence of a Global Security Network*, pp. 799, 801, 802, 814, *International Organization*, Vol. 72, No. 4, 2018, pp. 799-837, doi:10.1017/S0020818318000218.

⁵³ Brandon J. Kinne, *Defense Cooperation Agreements and the Emergence of a Global Security Network*, p. 809.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 815.

⁵⁵ Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 6, Princeton University Press, 2005.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 6, 35.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 6-9.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 183-200.

⁶⁰ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, pp. 357-358, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 357-360.

⁶² *Ibidem*, pp. 360-361.

⁶³ Vincent Charles Keating, Jan Ruzicka, *Trusting Relationships in International Politics: No need to hedge*, p. 755, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2014, pp. 753-770.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 753, 754, 755, 762.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 767.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 769.

De la formula „one size fits all” la condiționalitate diferențiată: o analiză comparativă a proceselor de aderare la UE ale Muntenegrului și Serbiei

George-Alin OPREA

Abstract

*This article analyses whether the European Union applies a uniform or differentiated approach in its enlargement policy through a comparison between Montenegro and Serbia. Formally, EU accession is based on common rules, especially the Copenhagen criteria and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, which suggests a “one size fits all” model.*

Using official EU documents and academic literature, the paper shows that Montenegro largely follows the traditional enlargement model, with negotiations focused on internal reforms, such as the rule of law, judicial independence, and anti-corruption measures. In contrast, Serbia faces an additional political condition: the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, monitored through Chapter 35 of the accession process.

The comparison demonstrates that, although the formal accession framework is common to all candidate states, the practical application of EU conditionality is differentiated. The article concludes that the “one size fits all” approach remains valid only at the formal level, while, in practice, the EU adapts its enlargement policy to the political and strategic context of each candidate country.

Keywords: differentiated conditionality, enlargement, European Union, „one size fits all”, Montenegro, Serbia

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1. Introducere

Procesul de extindere a Uniunii Europene reprezintă unul dintre cele mai importante instrumente de proiecție a stabilității, democrației și prosperității în Europa. În mod formal, acest proces este guvernat de un set clar de reguli și criterii uniforme, consacrate prin Criteriile de la Copenhaga, care stabilesc condițiile politice, economice și juridice pe care statele candidate trebuie să le îndeplinească pentru a deveni membre¹. Această abordare sugerează

existența unui model standardizat de integrare, adesea conceptualizat prin sintagma „one size fits all”.

Cu toate acestea, evoluțiile din cadrul politicii de extindere, în special în regiunea Balcanilor de Vest, indică o tendință spre flexibilitate și adaptare contextuală. În acest sens, procesul de aderare nu mai poate fi înțeles exclusiv ca un mecanism tehnic bazat pe adoptarea *acquis*-ului comunitar, ci și ca un instrument politic, influențat de factori geopolitici și de dinamici regionale specifice. Această schimbare

este vizibilă mai ales în cazul unor state candidate care se confruntă cu provocări particulare, ce depășesc cadrul standard al reformelor instituționale².

Literatura de specialitate privind extinderea Uniunii Europene evidențiază rolul central al condiționalității în promovarea transferului de reguli și norme către statele candidate³ (Schimmelfennig și Sedelmeier, 2004). Procesul a fost inițial structurat prin aplicarea unor criterii comune – Criteriile de la Copenhaga –, ceea ce sugerează existența unui model relativ uniform de integrare. În același timp, studiile arată că perspectiva aderării a stimulat reformele democratice în statele candidate⁴, fiind interpretată și prin prisma europenizării⁵. Cu toate acestea, literatura recentă indică o tendință de diferențiere și politizare a procesului de extindere, în special în Balcanii de Vest⁶, unde persistă și probleme legate de calitatea democrației⁷.

Acest articol își propune să analizeze în ce măsură Uniunea Europeană aplică o abordare uniformă sau diferențiată în procesul de integrare europeană, printr-o analiză comparativă a parcursurilor de integrare ale Muntenegrului și Serbiei. Alegerea acestor două state din Balcanii de Vest este justificată de faptul că au început cel mai devreme procesul de negocieri în comparație cu celelalte state candidate, precum și de faptul că între cele două cazuri există diferențe în ce privește condițiile impuse de UE.

În mod particular, cercetarea se concentrează asupra rolului condiționalității politice în cazul Serbiei, unde progresul în negocierile de aderare este strâns legat de normalizarea relațiilor cu Kosovo. Această cerință, formulată în cadrul dialogului facilitat de UE și reflectată în acorduri precum Acordul de la Bruxelles, introduce o dimensiune suplimentară față de criteriile standard aplicate altor state candidate, inclusiv Muntenegrului.

De acest aspect se leagă și întrebarea centrală a acestui articol: în ce măsură politica de extindere a UE reflectă o logică de tip „one size fits all” sau, dimpotrivă, una de tip „condiționalitate diferențiată”? Ipoteza de lucru susține că, deși cadrul formal al extinderii este uniform, în practică, Uniunea Europeană aplică o abordare diferențiată, determinată de factori

politici și geopolitici specifici fiecărui stat candidat, Serbia fiind supusă unor condiții suplimentare (normalizarea relațiilor cu Kosovo), spre deosebire de Muntenegru.

Metodologic, lucrarea utilizează o analiză comparativă a celor două cazuri, bazată pe documente oficiale ale UE, rapoarte ale Comisiei Europene și literatura de specialitate privind condiționalitatea în procesul de extindere. În prealabil, este prezentat cadrul teoretic, care analizează conceptele referitoare la europenizare și condiționalitate în contextul integrării europene, atât din prisma teoriei „one size fits all”, cât și din cea a politizării procesului de negociere și integrare, din care reiese conceptul de condiționalitate diferențiată.

2. Cadrul teoretic. Politica de extindere a UE

Procesul de extindere a Uniunii Europene este fundamentat pe ideea aplicării unor criterii uniforme tuturor statelor candidate, în special a Criteriilor de la Copenhaga (denumite după reuniunea Consiliului European de la Copenhaga în care au fost definite) și adoptarea aquis-ului comunitar.

Criteriile de la Copenhaga sunt condițiile esențiale pe care trebuie să le îndeplinească toate țările candidate pentru a putea deveni state membre ale UE. Acestea sunt criterii politice (stabilitatea instituțiilor care garantează democrația, statul de drept, drepturile omului, precum și respectarea și protecția minorităților), criterii economice (o economie de piață funcțională, precum și capacitatea de a face față concurenței și forțelor pieței), capacitatea administrativă și funcțională de a pune în aplicare în mod eficace aquis-ul UE, precum și capacitatea de a-și asuma obligațiile ce decurg din calitatea de stat membru al UE⁸. De asemenea, un element important de luat în seamă este capacitatea UE de a prelua noi membri, menținând, în același timp, dinamica integrării europene⁹.

Cea mai importantă și laborioasă etapă în parcursul de aderare a unui stat la Uniunea Europeană o reprezintă procesul de negocieri formale de aderare. Aceste negocieri contribuie

la pregătirea candidatului în perspectiva aderării și se axează pe adoptarea legislației consacrate a UE (acquis-ul comunitar) și pe punerea în aplicare a reformelor judiciare, administrative și economice necesare¹⁰.

Având în vedere acestea, se poate trage concluzia existenței unui model standardizat de integrare, ce poate fi definit drept formula „one size fits all”, care, deși nu este consacrat ca atare în literatura privind extinderea UE, poate fi utilizat pentru a descrie aplicarea uniformă a criteriilor de aderare tuturor statelor membre. Din această perspectivă, procesul de integrare europeană apare ca unul predominant tehnic și predictibil, în care diferențele dintre statele candidate sunt tratate ca variații de implementare, nu ca factori structurali care ar necesita adaptări semnificative ale condiționalității.

Cu toate acestea, de multe ori procesul de integrare europeană se depărtează de acest model uniform. Astfel, UE nu mai aplică un set rigid de condiții, ci introduce cerințe specifice în funcție de provocările particulare ale fiecărei țări. Această dinamică este evidentă mai ales în cazul statelor din Balcanii de Vest, unde procesul de aderare este influențat nu doar de reforme interne, ci și de factori geopolitici. Astfel, integrarea europeană devine un proces politic, în care condiționalitatea depășește cadrul tehnic al acquis-ului. Chiar dacă îndeplinirea standardelor economice și politice și conformarea cu termenii acquis-ului sunt condiții necesare pentru integrare, ele nu sunt neapărat și suficiente, statele membre trebuind să-și dea acordul pentru primirea de noi membri, aceasta fiind o prerogativă absolută și de necontestat¹¹.

Acest lucru a fost deja observat după valurile de aderare din 2004 și 2007, când, la Bruxelles, dar și în rândul cetățenilor UE, s-a instalat așa-numita „oboseală a extinderii”, consecința fiind că noile state candidate, printre care și cele din Balcanii de Vest, se confruntă cu un proces de aderare marcat de mult mai multe obstacole, incertitudini și condiții decât cele care au fost aplicate actualelor state membre ale Uniunii din centrul și estul Europei¹². O dovadă a acestui fapt a început să fie vizibilă încă din stadiile incipiente ale procesului de negociere a aderării la UE a statelor din Balcanii de Vest. În 2005, negocierile de aderare cu Croația au fost amânate timp de jumătate de an, iar în perioada

2006-2007, negocierile pentru semnarea Acordului de stabilizare și asociere cu Serbia au fost înghețate, ca urmare a refuzului acestor două state de a coopera cu Tribunalul Penal Internațional de la Haga pentru fosta Iugoslavie, pentru a deferi justiției doi criminali de război¹³.

3. Muntenegru și procesul de aderare la Uniunea Europeană

Muntenegru este frecvent prezentat în literatura de specialitate și în documentele oficiale ale Uniunii Europene drept unul dintre statele candidate cele mai avansate în procesul de aderare din regiunea Balcanilor de Vest. După referendumul privind independența din anul 2006, autoritățile de la Podgorița au adoptat o orientare strategică ferm pro-europeană, considerând aderarea la UE drept principalul obiectiv de politică externă și internă și acordând prioritate continuării negocierilor pentru Acordul de Asociere și Stabilizare cu UE, un prim pas către integrarea europeană¹⁴. Această direcție a fost consolidată prin reforme instituționale și prin asumarea unui discurs politic constant favorabil integrării europene.

Statutul de stat candidat a fost acordat Muntenegrului în anul 2010, iar negocierile de aderare au fost deschise oficial în 2012. Spre deosebire de alte state din regiune, Muntenegru a beneficiat de o imagine relativ pozitivă la nivel european, fiind perceput drept un actor predictibil și cooperant. Dimensiunea redusă a statului, lipsa unor conflicte regionale majore și consensul relativ larg privind direcția europeană au contribuit la această percepție favorabilă.

În prima etapă a negocierilor, progresele Muntenegrului au fost evaluate mai ales prin prisma deschiderii capitolelor de negociere și a ritmului de armonizare legislativă cu acquis-ul comunitar. În acest sens, statul a fost deseori calificat drept „frontrunner” al Balcanilor de Vest, având cele mai mari șanse să devină următorul membru al UE din regiune¹⁵. Totuși, în timp, accentul evaluării europene s-a mutat de la indicatorii cantitativi către calitatea reformelor implementate.

Un rol central în procesul de aderare l-au avut capitolele 23 și 24, referitoare la justiție,

drepturi fundamentale, libertate și securitate¹⁶. Comisia Europeană a insistat asupra necesității consolidării independenței sistemului judiciar, a combaterii corupției și a întăririi capacității administrative a statului. În mod repetat, rapoartele Comisiei au semnalat că reforma legislativă trebuie însoțită de rezultate concrete, în special în ceea ce privește condamnările pentru corupție la nivel înalt și combaterea crimei organizate¹⁷.

Deși cadrul formal al negocierilor a fost unul pozitiv, în plan intern Muntenegru s-a confruntat cu dificultăți structurale persistente, evidențiindu-se o formă de capturare a statului, caracterizată prin influența excesivă a elitelor politice asupra instituțiilor publice, relații clientelare și slăbiciuni ale mecanismelor de control democratic. Acest lucru a fost criticat de Comisia Europeană, care avertiza de asemenea că Muntenegru suferă de polarizare și instabilitate politică¹⁸.

Un alt element relevant îl reprezintă polarizarea politică și dificultățile de formare a unor majorități stabile după schimbările electorale recente. Aceste tensiuni au afectat ritmul reformelor și au generat întârzieri în implementarea recomandărilor europene. Astfel, deși Muntenegru a avansat formal în negocieri, ritmul transformării democratice s-a dovedit mai lent decât se preconiza prin indicatorii procedurali.

Totuși, ceea ce diferențiază cazul muntenegrean de alte state candidate este faptul că procesul de aderare a rămas concentrat aproape exclusiv asupra reformelor interne. Muntenegru nu a fost obligat să rezolve dispute teritoriale majore și nici nu a fost supus unor condiționalități geopolitice comparabile cu cele impuse altor state din regiune. Din această perspectivă, cazul său reflectă într-o măsură importantă modelul clasic al extinderii europene, bazat pe aplicarea standardizată a criteriilor de aderare.

Prin urmare, experiența Muntenegrului demonstrează că UE continuă să utilizeze un model tehnic și normativ de integrare acolo unde contextul politic permite acest lucru. Cazul său oferă astfel un punct de referință util pentru analiza comparativă cu Serbia, unde condiționalitatea a dobândit o dimensiune mult mai politizată.

4. Serbia și procesul de aderare la Uniunea Europeană

Serbia ocupă o poziție centrală în Balcanii de Vest atât din punct de vedere geografic, cât și politic, economic și demografic. Din acest motiv, relația dintre Serbia și Uniunea Europeană este considerată esențială pentru stabilitatea întregii regiuni. După schimbările politice de la începutul anilor 2000, integrarea europeană a devenit unul dintre obiectivele declarate ale politicii externe sârbe, chiar dacă această tendință a coexistat adesea cu orientări politice eurosceptice și naționaliste, iar după alegerile din 2012, regimul Aleksandar Vučić a centralizat puterea, ceea ce a dus la slăbirea instituțiilor independente, exercitându-și influența și asupra mass-mediei și preluând controlul asupra resurselor statului¹⁹, aspecte negative criticate de-a lungul timpului de Comisia Europeană²⁰. De asemenea, observatorii independenți au semnalat deteriorarea calității democrației și probleme privind asigurarea pluralismului politic²¹.

Serbia a obținut statutul de stat candidat în anul 2012, iar negocierile de aderare au fost lansate oficial în 2014. Ca și în cazul celorlalte state candidate, parcursul său european este evaluat prin prisma Criteriilor de la Copenhaga: consolidarea democrației, statul de drept, funcționarea economiei de piață și capacitatea de asumare a obligațiilor ce decurg din calitatea de membru.

Cu toate acestea, ceea ce diferențiază fundamental Serbia de alte state candidate este existența unei condiții suplimentare privind normalizarea relațiilor cu Kosovo. După proclamarea independenței Kosovo în 2008, relația dintre Belgrad și Priștina a rămas una dintre cele mai sensibile probleme ale regiunii. UE a integrat gestionarea acestui dosar în procesul de aderare al Serbiei, transformând extinderea într-un instrument de stabilizare regională.

Această dimensiune este reflectată instituțional prin capitolul 35 al negocierilor de aderare, care monitorizează implementarea angajamentelor asumate în dialogul facilitat de UE. Deși tehnic acest capitol este încadrat la „alte chestiuni”, în practică el a devenit unul dintre cele mai importante capitole

ale negocierilor, întrucât progresul general al Serbiei este frecvent corelat cu evoluțiile relației Belgrad–Priștina²².

Un moment de referință în acest proces l-a constituit Acordul de la Bruxelles, semnat în 2013 prin mediere europeană. Documentul a urmărit integrarea structurilor administrative din nordul Kosovo și stabilirea unor principii de cooperare instituțională. Acordul a fost considerat un pas important, însă implementarea sa a fost fragmentată, iar perioadele de tensiune politică au continuat să afecteze dialogul.

În plus, politica externă a Serbiei a complicat relația cu UE. Belgradul a menținut relații apropiate cu Rusia și a dezvoltat cooperarea economică cu China, încercând adesea să echilibreze mai multe centre de putere. Această strategie multivectorială a alimentat rezervele Bruxelles-ului privind angajamentul strategic deplin al Serbiei pentru integrare europeană.

Prin urmare, cazul Serbiei ilustrează faptul că politica de extindere a UE nu operează exclusiv prin reguli uniforme. Deși criteriile formale sunt aceleași pentru toate statele candidate, Serbia este supusă unor condiții suplimentare, de natură geopolitică și regională. Integrarea sa europeană depinde nu doar de reformele interne, ci și de capacitatea de a contribui la stabilitatea regională prin normalizarea relațiilor cu Kosovo.

În consecință, experiența sârbă evidențiază limitele modelului „one size fits all” și confirmă existența unor condiționări diferențiate, adaptate specificului politic al fiecărui stat candidat.

Concluzii

Compararea parcursului european al Muntenegrului și al Serbiei evidențiază diferențe semnificative în modul în care Uniunea Europeană aplică politica de extindere în Balcanii de Vest. Deși ambele state sunt candidate și sunt supuse formal acelorași criterii de aderare, natura și intensitatea condiționalității impuse diferă considerabil.

În cazul Muntenegrului, procesul de negociere a fost dominat în principal de cerințe

tehnice și instituționale. Accentul a fost pus pe reformarea sistemului judiciar, consolidarea statului de drept, combaterea corupției și modernizarea administrației publice. Obstacolele întâmpinate de Muntenegru au fost, în principal, de natură internă, legate de capacitatea administrativă și de voința politică de implementare a reformelor solicitate de UE. În acest sens, cazul muntenegrean reflectă într-o măsură importantă modelul clasic al extinderii europene, bazat pe condiționalitate standardizată.

În contrast, cazul Serbiei demonstrează existența unei condiționalități mai complexe. Pe lângă cerințele clasice privind democrația, statul de drept și economia de piață, Serbia este obligată să avanseze în procesul de normalizare a relațiilor cu Kosovo. Această cerință conferă negocierilor de aderare o dimensiune geopolitică distinctă, absentă în cazul Muntenegrului. Capitolul 35 al negocierilor a devenit un instrument central de monitorizare, transformând relația bilaterală Serbia–Kosovo într-un criteriu determinant al progresului european al Belgradului.

Prin urmare, dacă în cazul Muntenegrului integrarea europeană depinde în principal de reforme interne, în cazul Serbiei aceasta este condiționată atât de reforme interne, cât și de gestionarea unui conflict politic extern. Această diferență sugerează că politica de extindere a UE funcționează simultan pe două niveluri: unul normativ și uniform, bazat pe criteriile comune de aderare, și unul politic, adaptat contextului strategic al fiecărui stat candidat.

Analiza comparativă confirmă astfel că modelul „one size fits all” este valabil doar la nivel formal. În practică, Uniunea Europeană aplică o formă de condiționalitate diferențiată, în care cerințele suplimentare sunt introduse în funcție de realitățile geopolitice și de interesele regionale ale Uniunii.

Nu în ultimul rând, comparația dintre cele două state candidate la aderare din cadrul Balcanilor de Vest, dar și problemele cu care s-au confruntat Serbia și Croația în 2005-2007 relevă că problemele nerezolvate din trecut, cauzate de conflictele etnice din fosta Iugoslavie, continuă să influențeze procesul de integrare europeană pentru unele state din regiune.

Pe de-o parte, Muntenegru este un exemplu de stat din Balcanii de Vest în privința căruia Uniunea Europeană nu condiționează finalizarea negocierilor de aderare de obligații suplimentare în afara clasicelor Criterii de la Copenhaga. Aceasta se explică prin specificitatea cazului muntenegrean, un stat aflat în relații normale cu vecinii săi și care nu a fost afectat semnificativ de conflictele din anii '90, fiind deci ferit de moștenirea nefastă a războaielor din timpul destrămării Iugoslaviei.

Pe de altă parte, cazul Serbiei este diferit de cel al Muntenegrului. Astfel, diferendul dintre Serbia și Kosovo, o moștenire a războaielor din fosta Iugoslavie din anii '90, reprezintă un element specific care a determinat Uniunea Europeană să adauge Belgradului o condiție suplimentară pentru aderare, un exemplu clasic de condiționalitate diferențiată, în opoziție cu abordarea teoretică „one size fits all”, prin care statele candidate au de îndeplinit aceleași criterii și reguli pentru aderare. Deși în teorie există un cadru uniform pentru negocieri între UE și statele candidate, particularitățile fiecărui stat fac ca acest cadru să fie adaptat în consecință.

Note

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¹⁹ Florian Bieber, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

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Protecția infrastructurii critice submarine: Noul angajament al NATO

Dr. Liana-Adriana STAICU

Abstract

Following the Nord Stream sabotage in the Baltic Sea, as well as the growing need to protect communication lines between strategic commanders, NATO has intensified its efforts to establish and implement a new political and military instrument at the level of the Alliance. This initiative is aimed at enhancing the security of submarine cables and pipelines, while also developing an improved mechanism for monitoring and assessing potential threats addressed to the critical undersea infrastructure (CUI). Despite certain limitations and the complexity of this sector, NATO, through its operational capabilities, remains the primary actor capable of deterring and preventing attacks against CUI. Romania represents a key stakeholder in the advancement of critical infrastructure in the Black Sea region, given its strategic position and vested economic and security interests.

Keywords: NATO, CUI, Russia, threats, Russian Undersea Research Programme (RURP), China, Black Sea, maritime platforms, submarine cables

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În contextul schimbărilor dramatice ale mediului de securitate european, anul 2022 a marcat un moment de cotitură în percepția vulnerabilităților infrastructurii critice submarine (ICS). Sabotajul conductelor Nord Stream 1 și Nord Stream 2, care a avut loc în Marea Baltică, nu a fost considerat doar un atac asupra infrastructurii energetice, ci un semnal puternic privind necesitatea protejării ICS la nivelul Alianței Nord-Atlantice. Problema este că aceste sisteme sunt greu de protejat, întrucât ele se întind pe mii de kilometri, atât în ape naționale, cât și internaționale, iar responsabilitatea este dispersată. O mare parte din infrastructură este deținută de companii private, în timp ce protecția cade în sarcina statelor aliate. România, membru aliat cu interese stra-

tegice și economice la Marea Neagră, având o ICS în dezvoltare, nu face excepție, alăturându-se, încă de la început, efortului de angajare colectivă. Indiscutabil, includerea chestiunii ICS pe agenda NATO reprezintă o oportunitate și un avantaj strategic pentru România. Întrebarea-cheie este în ce măsură România, ca parte a efortului aliat, poate beneficia de acest avantaj și dacă are capacitatea de a identifica rapid un set de măsuri politice și operaționale cu aplicare imediată, reunite într-un cadru instituțional mai larg, împreună cu NATO și UE.

La nivel colectiv, alianța se confruntă cu numeroase provocări, variind de la definirea ICS, natura vulnerabilităților și a riscurilor, actorii implicați și constrângerile generate de inconsecvențele cadrului juridic internațional

și ale responsabilității naționale, până la natura angajamentului colectiv privind protecția infrastructurii și modalitățile de implementare la nivelul NATO.

Primele referiri la protecția ICS – pe care NATO¹ o consideră esențială pentru securitatea sa – apar în Conceptul Strategic NATO din 2022², adoptat de șefii de stat și guvern în cadrul Summitului NATO de la Madrid³. Noua Strategie Maritimă a NATO (2025)⁴ a evidențiat, de asemenea, noi dezvoltări în cadrul acestei linii de efort. Evoluțiile recente ne arată că atacurile și incidentele survenite ulterior celor din august 2022 se încadrează cu preponderență în spectrul războiului hibrid, implicând utilizarea atât a mijloacelor convenționale, cât și a celor neconvenționale, fapt ce a determinat declanșarea unui efort unitar la nivelul alianței pentru asigurarea protecției infrastructurii atât prin mijloace militare, cât și printr-un cadru politic angrenat într-o serie de organisme, organizații și platforme de cooperare. Cu certitudine, la nivelul NATO, protecția ICS este considerată atât o responsabilitate națională, cât și un angajament colectiv.

De ce contează infrastructura submarină atât de mult pentru aliați? Pentru că un singur cablu sau o conductă nu poate fi protejată pe toată lungimea, întrucât este dificil de monitorizat permanent și poate fi ușor sabotată – fie în mod discret, cu ajutorul scafandrilor, dronelor, submarinelor mici, fie în mod ostentativ, prin distrugerii fizice –, actuala securitate energetică devenind, astfel, o prioritate a alianței.

Subiectul nu poate fi abordat fără a sublinia câteva elemente definitorii, precum definiția și natura vulnerabilităților și riscurilor, actorii implicați, constrângerile generate de lipsa de uniformitate a cadrului juridic internațional și interferența acestuia cu cadrele naționale destul de diverse, natura angajamentului colectiv de a proteja infrastructura, precum și cu modalitățile de implementare la nivel NATO.

1. Definiția infrastructurii critice submarine

În ciuda numeroaselor abordări privind conținutul elementelor ICS, nu există o definiție oficială și cuprinzătoare a acesteia la ni-

velul alianței, tocmai din cauza caracterului inovator al tehnologiilor implicate și a naturii evolutive a ICS. În urma eforturilor aliaților de a identifica necesitățile de protecție a ICS, a fost agreată o definiție de lucru, potrivit căreia ICS include toate cablurile de comunicații și energie, sistemele de conducte pentru transportul petrolului și gazelor, precum și platformele maritime de foraj și extracție a petrolului și gazelor, atât din apele teritoriale, cât și din zonele de mare adâncime, precum și instalațiile onshore – terminale terestre de captare a gazelor și petrolului. Vulnerabilitățile acestor elemente de infrastructură derivă tocmai din structura lor, din tehnologiile utilizate, din amplasarea lor geografică și din caracterul neunitar al regimului juridic care reglementează apele internaționale sau al legislațiilor naționale din acest domeniu. Pentru o mai bună înțelegere a complexității problematicii, credem că este necesar să oferim detalii cu privire la componența ICS. Astfel, cablurile submarine se împart în două categorii: a) cabluri de comunicații militare (strategic lines of communications/SLOC) și cabluri civile, care sunt cabluri de fibră optică ce transportă date, și b) cabluri electrice submarine care transportă energie electrică și sunt proiectate să fie foarte durabile și rezistente la condiții dure de mediu, fiind amplasate, în mare parte, pe fundul mărilor și oceanelor. Acestea pot fi supuse actelor de sabotaj prin afectarea integrității lor fizice prin explozii, tăiere sau clonarea datelor, precum și prin activități de spionaj. Pentru exemplificare, numai începând cu 2021, au avut loc opt incidente de tăiere a cablurilor, neatribuite dar suspecte, în regiunea euro-atlantică. De asemenea, *platformele maritime* reprezintă o altă componentă importantă a infrastructurii critice offshore, fiind utilizată pentru extracția și procesarea petrolului și a gazelor naturale. Aceste platforme sunt fixe sau plutitoare și sunt amplasate în apele teritoriale naționale sau în zonele economice exclusive ale statelor membre NATO. Rolul acestor platforme este legat, în principal, de extracția resurselor naturale din zăcămintele submarine, de procesarea resurselor atunci când acestea sunt echipate cu facilități de procesare, precum și de transportul resurselor în situațiile în care sunt conectate la conducte submarine care transportă resursele

naturale către terminalele de stocare și încărcare. Provocările și riscurile asociate platformelor maritime se înscriu în sfera siguranței și securității, întrucât acestea sunt vulnerabile la accidente, defecțiuni tehnice și acte de sabotaj, care pot genera consecințe grave asupra mediului și economiei.

2. Care sunt cele mai semnificative amenințări la adresa infrastructurii critice submarine în contextul actual de securitate?

În actualul context, evoluțiile recente sugerează că principalele amenințări la adresa ICS depășesc sfera riscurilor tehnice sau de navigație, fiind tot mai strâns legate de dinamica competiției geopolitice. Astfel, ICS se conturează ca un nou front al conflictelor hibride, unde descurajarea și acțiunea, inclusiv în cadrul alianței, devin din ce în ce mai greu de calibrat. În consecință, se poate contura următoarea clasificare a principalelor amenințări, după cum urmează:

1. **Rusia**, prin programul său RURP – condus de *Direcția Principală de Cercetare în Ape Adânci* –, reprezintă principala amenințare la adresa ICS. Programul are două componente: una civilă (care acoperă cartografierea și cercetarea științifică civilă) și una militară, care implică utilizarea de submarine specializate, nave de suprafață echipate cu senzori avansați, submersibile de mare adâncime și vehicule subacvatice fără pilot (UUVs). Ce este special în cazul acestora este faptul că implică atât o gamă largă de *drone de lovire*, cât și drone de recunoaștere și spionaj utilizate pentru operații de culegere de informații (intelligence gathering), operații pe fundul mărilor și oceanelor (seabed operations), precum și pentru operații de sabotaj care vizează infrastructura critică, în special cablurile de comunicații, care sunt mai vulnerabile la deteriorări fizice prin secționare. Obiectivul militar principal al acestui program este monitorizarea și perturbarea, până la întrerupere, a activității sistemelor de supraveghere ale alianței, a cablurilor energetice și de comunicații, precum și a altor

componente ale ICS. Deoarece programul are aplicații atât în domeniul civil, cât și în cel militar, este dificilă diferențierea între activitățile de cercetare științifică și operațiile militare sau de sabotaj.

Totodată, Federația Rusă poate utiliza acțiuni de bruiaj și *spoofing*, acestea din urmă constând în generarea de informații înșelătoare menite să inducă în eroare terminalele GPS utilizate pentru navigația electronică a navelor și pentru stațiile de coordonare și separare a traficului maritim, precum și comunicațiile acestora prin satelit. Programul RURP se desfășoară în toate zonele de interes atât ale Federației Ruse, cât și ale NATO: Oceanul Atlantic, zona Nordul Îndepărtat, Marea Baltică, Marea Mediterană și Marea Neagră, regiuni care conțin ICS semnificative ale aliaților, necesitând misiuni de patrulare și monitorizare ale alianței, cu efect de descurajare. În acest context, Rusia se evidențiază nu doar prin capacitatea tehnică de a desfășura astfel de acțiuni, ci și prin disponibilitatea de a exploata ambiguitatea și negarea plauzibilă pentru a evita consecințele directe. Prin urmare, rolul său de principal vector de risc în acest domeniu nu poate fi minimizat în evaluările privind protecția ICS.

2. **China**, un alt actor statal, reprezintă *principala amenințare în creștere* la adresa ICS a aliaților, din mai multe motive⁵:

a) deținerea de către companiile chineze de stat și private a unei poziții de lider în tehnologii-cheie utilizate în sectoarele ICS, precum cablurile optice, dronele și senzorii cu tehnologie avansată;⁶

b) asigurarea strategică de către China a unor participațiuni consistente în infrastructura portuară europeană.⁷ Preluarea porturilor europene de către companiile chineze este considerată un risc crescut de securitate pentru statele europene aliate, datorită faptului că, legislația chineză, începând cu 2017, impune companiilor chineze și filialelor străine să furnizeze sprijin logistic navelor, aeronavelor, vehiculelor și personalului desemnat pentru operațiuni militare, fără a stabili delimitări clare între jurisdicțiile interne și externe sau între entitățile de stat și cele private. Mai mult, capacitatea sporită a companiilor chineze de

a colecta și gestiona informații ar putea conduce la perturbări ale operațiunilor de transport maritim și ale lanțurilor de aprovizionare în care sunt integrate elementele ale ICS.⁸ În consecință, Comisia Europeană consideră necesară elaborarea unui cadru de politici strategice la nivelul UE pentru reducerea și limitarea influenței și controlului operațional al Chinei și al altor state terțe asupra infrastructurii critice din cadrul UE. De asemenea, urmează să fie adoptate măsuri de atenuare, precum și întocmirea unui inventar complet al activelor esențiale și o evaluare sistematică a vulnerabilității acestora la influențe externe, fiind necesară extinderea inițiativelor legislative pentru abordarea acestor riscuri;

c) strategia de fuziune militar-civilă (MCF) a Chinei reprezintă un program coordonat și condus de stat, precum și un ansamblu de planuri menite să utilizeze toate pârghiile puterii statale și comerciale pentru consolidarea și sprijinirea Partidul Comunist Chinez și a componentei sale militare, Armata Populară de Eliberare (APE).⁹ Forțele navale chineze dispun de resursele și instrumentele juridice necesare pentru a asigura capacitatea de utilizare a navelor și infrastructurii civile proprii în scopuri militare și de securitate, permițând Chinei să își utilizeze infrastructura comercială civilă pentru sprijinirea prezenței APE în țări terțe. UE avertizează că această fuziune militar-civilă oferă APE acces la porturile străine, permițându-i plasarea sprijinului logistic destinat susținerii activităților navale în zone precum Oceanul Indian, Marea Mediterană și Oceanul Atlantic. De asemenea, UE subliniază că riscurile de spionaj sunt cele mai ridicate atunci când activele comerciale civile chineze sunt amplasate în centre logistice din apropierea bazelor navale NATO din Europa. Totodată, această strategie de fuziune militar-civilă trebuie înțeleasă într-un context geopolitic, economic și strategic mai amplu, având în vedere interconectările sale cu inițiative precum Belt and Road Initiative (*One Belt, One Road*)¹⁰, Inițiativa de Securitate Globală, Strategia Dublei Circulații, China Standards 2035 etc. UE subliniază importanța unui efort coordonat pentru contracararea acestei amenințări, subliniind necesitatea colaborării UE–

NATO în elaborarea unui plan pe termen lung destinat limitării influenței strategiei chineze în Europa și în implementarea raportului final de evaluare al grupului operativ UE–NATO privind ICS¹¹.

Totodată, apar numeroase referiri privind noile dezvoltări ale programului de spionaj submarin cunoscut ca „Marele Zid Subacvatic”, constituit dintr-un sistem de cabluri echipate cu senzori de interceptare amplasați pe fundul Mării Chinei de Sud, susținut de o flotă de drone și nave subacvatice și de suprafață.

Trebuie subliniat faptul că incidentele în care sunt implicate entitățile chineze par să se încadreze în spectrul celor de natură hibridă, care ar putea acoperi și accidente de navigație – incidente dificil de identificat și atribuit cu claritate. Astfel, la 8 octombrie 2023, conducătorul de gaz Balticconnector¹² dintre Finlanda și Estonia a fost închisă după ce a fost avariata în urma unei coliziuni cu ancora navei cargo New Polar Bear, care naviga sub pavilionul Hong Kongului. Ulterior, în aceeași zi, a fost afectat și un cablu de comunicații care lega Suedia de Estonia. În noiembrie 2024, cablul de telecomunicații Arelion, care leagă insula suedeză Gotland de Lituania, precum și cablul C-Lion 1 care leagă Helsinki și portul german Rostock, a fost secționat la sud de insula suedeză Oland. Suspiciunile s-au concentrat asupra navei Yi Peng 3, sub pavilion chinez, identificată în perimetru. China a respins solicitarea procurorilor de a efectua o investigație și a părăsit zona, iar, la scurt timp după aceea, alte două cabluri suedeze de telecomunicații au fost secționate.

3. Alte riscuri, în afară de cele generate de actori statali precum Federația Rusă și China, sunt cele de natură teroristă, cibernetică (prin atacuri asupra centrelor de comunicații și de date care reglementează sau coordonează activitatea în domeniul maritim) și hibridă – ce pot fi proiectate și de actori nestatali –, dar și cele provocate de activitățile seismice ale plăcilor tectonice, de erupțiile vulcanice submarine sau de distrugerii fizice neintenționate, produse prin accidente de navigație. De altfel, anual se înregistrează aproximativ 200 de cabluri avariate din cauza ancorelor navelor.

3. Dezvoltări politice și operaționale la nivelul alianței

Evenimentul declanșator ce va determina o resetare la nivelul Alianței Nord-Atlantice privind ICS este explozia din data de 26 august 2022 a gazoductului Nord Stream 2, construit de Rusia pentru a transporta gaz direct în Germania, pe sub Marea Baltică. Sistemul fusese construit în 2021 și nu funcționa din cauza lipsei de certificare din partea autorităților europene, dar conducta conținea gaz sub presiune. Peste 14% din suprafața Marii Baltice a fost afectată de distribuirea metanului prin curenți; în consecință, autoritățile din Suedia și Danemarca au deschis anchete oficiale, calificând incidentul drept „**sabotaj major**”, iar NATO a descris incidentele ca fiind rezultatul unor acte deliberate, **și nu accidentale**¹³. În consecință, NATO și-a intensificat prezența militară în Marea Baltică, iar Germania și Danemarca, în mod voluntar și în coordonare cu Comandamentul Maritim Aliat (MARCOM), au asigurat misiuni de patrulare și supraveghere maritimă și aeriană pentru a detecta nave sau activități suspecte. Incidentul a subliniat pentru NATO cât de vulnerabile sunt conductele de energie, cablurile de internet și alte infrastructuri submarine la actele de sabotaj sau atacurile hibride, precum și importanța unor planuri și mecanisme de reacție în vederea contracarării amenințărilor la adresa ICS. După 2022, grupurile navale multinaționale formate din fregate, distrugătoare și nave de sprijin SNMG (Standing NATO Maritime Groups 1 and 2) îndeplinesc și misiuni active de descurajare și protecție a ICS. După aderarea Finlandei (2023) și a Suediei (2024) la NATO, Marea Baltică devine **o mare de tip NATO**, deoarece aproape toate statele riverane sunt membre ale alianței, Rusia deținând un acces limitat prin Kaliningrad și Golful Finic. Faptul acesta permite acum o coordonare rapidă, un schimb de informații în timp real și un răspuns colectiv angajat în caz de incidente.

Primele demersuri instituționale, după declarațiile politice din septembrie 2022, au fost demarate la începutul anului 2023, când a fost constituită, la nivelul Secretariatului Internațional, Celula de coordonare privind ICS. Ime-

diat după aceea, aliații au convenit înființarea unui Centru Maritim pentru Securitatea Infrastructurii Critice Submarine (*Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Underwater Infrastructure*) în cadrul Comandamentului Maritim Aliat din Norfolk, fiindu-i atribuite misiuni de descurajare și apărare împotriva diferitelor tipuri de acțiuni ce ar putea afecta integritatea fizică sau capacitatea funcțională a diverselor componente ale ICS, în mai 2024. În același an, s-a creat *Rețeaua NATO pentru protecția infrastructurii critice submarine* pentru aliați, sectorul privat și alți actori relevanți, în vederea îmbunătățirii schimbului de informații și bune practici, prin stabilirea Punctelor Strategice și Operaționale; prima întâlnire la nivelul punctelor de contact strategice a avut loc la sediul NATO, în mai 2024. Totodată, în iunie 2024 a fost lansată și operațiunea *Joint Expeditionary Force Trains Protecting Critical Undersea Infrastructure (JEF)*, constând într-o serie de activități menite să protejeze infrastructura critică în nordul Europei.

Cel mai grav incident de la sabotarea conductelor Nord Stream a avut loc în decembrie 2025, prin avarierea cablului de interconectare electrică Estlink 2 dintre Estonia și Finlanda, împreună cu alte patru linii de comunicații.¹⁴ Finlanda a suspectat și a sechestrat petrolierul Eagles, aflat sub pavilionul Insulelor Cook, care transporta petrol rusesc către Port Said, în Egipt, despre care s-a constatat că îi lipsea ancora. Nava Eagle a fost considerată ca făcând parte din „Flota Fantomă” a Federației Ruse, utilizată pentru transportul produselor petroliere supuse embargoului impus Federației Ruse. Este important de subliniat timpul rapid de reacție al autorităților estoniene; este cunoscut faptul că Estonia deține unul din cele mai avansate sisteme de proceduri, intervenții și mecanisme de reacție pentru incidente care implică ICS. Conform autorităților estoniene, daunele aduse ICS au fost considerate prea grave pentru a putea fi considerate accidente sau manevre maritime neglijente. În consecință, la 30 decembrie 2024, Alianța Nord-Atlantică, prin *Declarația de Solidaritate* cu cei doi aliați afectați, și-a exprimat îngrijorarea, luând în considerație întărirea eforturilor de contracarare a amenințărilor la adresa infrastructurii submarine printr-un angajament colectiv.

Practic, la începutul anului 2025, a fost lansată o inițiativă NATO – *TASK Force X* – prin înființarea unei unități specializate, axate pe valorificarea tehnologiilor emergente și disruptive, pentru consolidarea securității maritime a alianței, prin adoptarea rapidă a sistemelor autonome și a inteligenței artificiale (AI) în operațiunile maritime, cu misiunea de patrulare în scopul protejării infrastructurii critice.

În cadrul *Forumului Statelor Baltice*, desfășurat la Helsinki, în ianuarie 2025, NATO a lansat operațiunea multidomeniu *NATO Operation Baltic Sentry*, având ca obiectiv sporirea securității ICS din zona Mării Baltice. Operațiunea a fost lansată ca urmare a frecvenței ridicate a incidentelor care au implicat avarierea cablurilor submarine, culminând cu evenimentele din 25 decembrie 2024. Această inițiativă, la care participă Suedia, Germania, Danemarca și statele baltice¹⁵, urmărește descurajarea potențialelor amenințări, în special ca reacție la incidentele de sabotaj, care au ridicat semnale de alarmă privind vulnerabilitatea acestor componente vitale ale infrastructurii submarine. **Baltic Sentry**, coordonată de Comandamentul Forței Întrunite Aliate NATO de la Brunssum, ca parte a Activităților de Vigilență Consolidată ale NATO (*Enhanced Vigilant Activities* – eVA), avea ca scop îmbunătățirea procedurilor operaționale de lucru împreună cu MARCOM, care are un rol central în coordonarea operațiilor maritime ale aliaților. Inițiativa Baltic Sentry se bazează, de asemenea, pe activitatea Centrului Maritim NATO pentru Securitatea Infrastructurii Critice Submarine (NMSCUI), în ceea ce privește coordonarea schimbului de informații și acțiunilor dintre statele membre NATO, asigurând o abordare proactivă față de potențialele amenințări.

În iunie 2025, s-a desfășurat jocul de război *Digital Ocean Vision* (Viziunea Digitală a Oceanului), care a oferit participanților oportunitatea de a testa și compara sisteme de generație viitoare și tehnologii emergente disruptive – precum nave fără echipaj, sisteme de detecție bazate pe inteligență artificială și platforme de partajare a datelor în timp real pentru schimb de date tactice – cu platforme tradiționale precum fregate, corvete, aeronave de patrulare maritimă și submarine¹⁶. Rezulta-

tele jocului de război au confirmat că: a) platformele tradiționale *continuă* să demonstreze superioritate în ceea ce privește rezistența și puterea de foc brută în sensul de a produce daune masive direct și rapid; b) noile tehnologii prezintă un potențial semnificativ în ceea ce privește disimularea, scalabilitatea și integrarea datelor.¹⁷

Pe lângă aceste inițiative NATO, protecția infrastructurii submarine a fost abordată și printr-o serie de activități desfășurate de Organizația NATO pentru Știință și Tehnologie (Science and Technologies Organization), Centrul de Excelență pentru Securitate Maritimă (Maritime Security Center of Excellence - MARSEC COE) din Turcia¹⁸ și Centrul pentru Cercetare și Experimentare Maritimă (STO's Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation) din La Spezia, Italia.

De interes pentru arealul Marii Negre și, cu predilecție, pentru România, a fost inițiativa statelor riverane de constituire a **Grupului operativ pentru combaterea minelor marine în Marea Neagră. (Mine Countermeasures Black Sea Task Group - MCSBTG)** în ianuarie 2024, la Istanbul. Memorandumul de înțelegere a stabilit principiul de comandă prin rotație, România preluând comanda grupului¹⁹ în perioada 9 iulie 2025 - 11 ianuarie 2026. Sub comanda Forțelor Navale Române, au avut loc două activări ale grupului, când navele au participat la exercițiile multinaționale BREEZE și POSEIDON.

4. Infrastructura critică submarină de interes pentru România în Marea Neagră

Pentru România, ca stat aliat, protecția infrastructurii critice este privită ca un domeniu de maxim interes atât pentru momentul prezent, cât și în perspectivă, datorită proiectelor economice cu actori statali și privați din apele teritoriale, precum și din zona economică liberă. Aceste proiecte vizează facilități portuare și terminale de debarcare (landing sites), ansamblul de platforme de explorare și extracție a hidrocarburilor, câmpuri petrolifere și gazeifere, precum și cabluri de comunicații și de

electricitate cu Georgia. Situația de securitate excepțională a Mării Negre „**de mare la război**” – determinată de războiul din Ucraina și instituirea de către Rusia a unor zone de interdicție în jurul Crimeei²⁰ – afectează și anumite porțiuni din Zona Economică Exclusivă a României, prin plasarea unor sisteme antiacces A2/AD (area denial), cum ar fi radare Monolit B, sisteme de război electronic și de bruiaj, sisteme antiaeriene și antirachetă (S-400, S-300), precum și sisteme antinavă (Bastion, Bal)²¹, ceea ce impune abordări distincte cu privire la protecția infrastructurii critice, diferite de cele aplicabile în alte mări de interes (overlap areas), afectând în mod direct interesele economice ale României.

Printre componentele de interes ale ICS pentru România se numără atât infrastructura energetică offshore, cât și proiectele de exploatare a resurselor de gaze naturale și a zăcămintelor petrolifere, precum și cablurile submarine de telecomunicații, esențiale pentru conectivitate digitală, după cum urmează:

a) Exploatarea zăcămintelor petrolifere din apele teritoriale de mică adâncime și din zonele offshore ale platformei continentale a Mării Negre a început încă din anul 1976, când *platforma Gloria* a fost pusă în exploatare. Ulterior, au fost construite și alte *platforme de foraj marin*, precum *Orizont*, *Prometeu*, *Fortuna*, *Atlas*, *Jupiter* și *Saturn*. Aflate în posesia companiei Petrom, șase dintre cele șapte platforme au fost vândute la sfârșitul anului 2002 companiei Grup Servicii Petroliere. Platforma Saturn operează în largul coastelor României, în timp ce Platforma Prometeu operează în largul coastelor Bulgariei, fiind gestionată de compania britanică Melrose Resource în zona Capului Kaliacra 2;

b) *Noile câmpuri petrolifere și platformele asociate*. În Marea Neagră, în prezent, există mai multe câmpuri petrolifere, dintre care menționăm Neptun 1, Neptun 2, Histria, cel mai important fiind Neptun Deep, deținut de OMV Petrom și Romgaz. Acest perimetru se află la o distanță de aproximativ 160 km de țărm, în ape cu o adâncime cuprinsă între 100 și 1.000 m și pe o suprafață de 7.500 km pătrați, fiind cel mai important proiect de exploatare a gazelor naturale din zona românească a Mării Negre și primul proiect offshore în ape de

adâncime din România. Totodată, el reprezintă un proiect strategic ce va contribui la securitatea și independența energetică a României.²² Scurtul istoric al acestui proiect marchează și o serie de progrese, astfel: în anul 2023 au fost aprobate planurile de dezvoltare ale zăcămintelor Domino și Pelican Sud și au fost semnate acordurile de execuție cu companiile Saipem, Transocean Barents și Halliburton. În noiembrie 2024 au fost înregistrate evoluții în dezvoltarea proiectului prin sosirea unității mobile de foraj offshore contractate pentru forarea sondelor; în luna martie a început forajul primei sonde din cele 10 sonde de producție proiectate, urmând ca activitățile de extragere a gazului să înceapă în anul 2027.²³ Infrastructura necesară pentru dezvoltarea zăcămintelor comerciale Domino și Pelican Sud include 10 sonde, trei sisteme de producție submarine și conducte, precum și colectoare asociate, o platformă offshore, conducte principale către Tuzla și o stație de măsurare a gazelor;

c) **Black Sea Submarine Cable (BSSC)** sau **Green Energy Corridor**. În decembrie 2022, guvernele României, Georgiei, Azerbaidjanului și Ungariei au semnat un Acord privind Parteneriatul Strategic în domeniul energiei verzi și al transportului, prin care se inițiază proiectul cablului de energie între Georgia și Europa, prin România. Această etapă a fost urmată de semnarea unui Memorandum de înțelegere (iulie 2023) pentru stabilirea *joint-venture-ului Green Energy Corridor Power Company*, care gestionează proiectul construirii cablului și s-a finalizat cu semnarea unui memorandum de cooperare specific pentru proiectul cablului submarin, în scopul facilitării colaborării între autorități privind supravegherea și implementarea proiectului. Cablul electric submarin România-Georgia, cu o lungime de 1200 km (majoritatea sub apă) și cu o capacitate estimată de transport a energiei de până la 1300 MW, are ca scop conectarea rețelelor electrice din Caucaz cu Europa și schimbul de energie din surse regenerabile. Acesta a fost desemnat de Comisia Europeană ca proiect de interes comun, ceea ce îl plasează pe lista inițiativelor energetice strategice susținute de UE și îl transformă în hubul energetic al UE în regiune. În acest sens, proiectul va beneficia de suport legal și financiar din partea UE, fiind văzut ca

un instrument de conectare economică și geopolitică. Costul pentru construirea cablului submarin de înaltă tensiune în curent continuu (HVDC) este estimat la 3,5 miliarde de euro și va include instalarea cablului submarin pe fundul mării, precum și infrastructura de conectare pe uscat în România (Constanța) și Georgia, cu stații de conversie uriașe. De asemenea, există discuții pentru dublarea acestuia cu un cablu de date. Finanțarea provine de la statele participante, companii energetice, fonduri europene și bănci internaționale precum BEI și BERD, cu estimare de recuperare a investiției de 15-25 de ani. În prezent, proiectul este încă în faza de pre construcție, aprobări financiare și pregătire a licitațiilor, având ca termen de începere a construcției cablului submarin luna mai 2026 și finalizarea acesteia în 2030.

Tot în arealul Mării Negre, în paralel cu proiectul dintre Georgia și România, există acorduri și memorandumuri de înțelegere între Turcia, Georgia, Azerbaidjan și Bulgaria privind cooperarea în domeniul energiei verzi, Turcia preferând să dezvolte proiecte paralele sau alte interconexiuni cu Bulgaria, Grecia sau Georgia, fără a se implica direct în proiectul cablului submarin HVDC Georgia-România. Considerentele Turciei de a nu participa la acest proiect țin de costurile de investiții, de diferențele tehnice (Turcia folosește mai mult curent alternativ (AC) în rețea, conectarea necesitând stații de conversie CC/AC), precum și de perspectivele politice și strategice. Participarea Turciei într-un consorțiu în care deciziile sunt luate de Georgia, România și Ungaria i-ar putea limita influența în strategia energetică regională. Fără echivoc, Turcia își dorește să acționeze ca hub energetic, să dețină controlul asupra fluxului de energie, să încaseze taxe de tranzit și să reducă dependența de sursele externe. Situația este și mai complexă, datorită prezenței gazoductului submarin TurkStream inaugurat în noiembrie 2018 și care a început să transporte gaz, inclusiv către Bulgaria și Macedonia de Nord, înlocuind livrările prin conducta Trans-Balkan, care tranzita Ucraina și România. Pe de altă parte, deși nu se află în gestiunea sa directă, România participă la rețeaua KAFOS – Sistemul de fibră optică din Marea Neagră. Acesta este un cablu submarin de telecomunicații care conectează

România, Bulgaria și Turcia, fiind administrat de compania turcă TurkTelekom. În consecință, Turcia investește masiv în infrastructura submarină pentru a deveni un hub energetic și digital în regiunea Mării Negre și a Caucazului, corelând securitatea aprovizionării cu beneficiile tranzitului și influența geopolitică în zona Mării Negre.

Bulgaria, un alt aliat NATO, deține, la rândul său, și componente de infrastructură submarină, precum KAFOS (Black Sea Fibre Optic System) – sistemul de cabluri de date ce leagă Varna de Istanbul, menționat anterior –, dar și proiecte noi de cabluri, precum Kardesa, ce vor conecta Bulgaria, Georgia, Turcia și Ucraina, cu o investiție de 100 de milioane de euro. Mai mult decât atât, Bulgaria și-a exprimat intenția de a se alătura Coridorului Verde, inițiat de România și Georgia, zona Mării Negre devenind sediul unei arhitecturi mai complexe de platforme, cabluri și conducte aflate în responsabilitate națională, fiind indicat să fie protejată colectiv, la nivel de alianță.

România continuă și la nivel politic să își manifeste interesul pentru acest domeniu, în luna august 2025 alăturându-se *Declarației comune privind securitatea și reziliența cablurilor submarine într-o lume digitalizată la nivel global, în coordonare cu partenerii din SUA și UE*. Declarația vizează alinierea acțiunilor concrete axate pe protejarea acestor infrastructuri vitale²⁴.

Concluzii și recomandări

Protecția ICS a devenit prioritară pentru NATO, având în vedere numeroasele incidente ce au evidențiat vulnerabilitatea acestuia la eventuale atacuri fizice și hibride, ceea ce a impus implementarea unor acțiuni și inițiative cu rol de contracarare a amenințărilor și riscurilor la adresa infrastructurii. Luând în considerație viitoarele proiecte energetice, România a participat activ la eforturile de promovare a domeniului infrastructurii submarine pe agenda de discuții a alianței. Completarea definiției ICS prin introducerea platformelor de extracție a gazelor și petrolului a reprezentat un succes al diplomației românești (2023), contribuind și la

stabilirea unei platforme comune la nivel aliat privind schimbul de informații, cartografierea zonelor cu infrastructură submarină în ariile de interes ale alianței și schimbul de bune practici printr-o interfață de puncte de contact (PoC) la nivel național interguvernamental.

Problematica infrastructurii critice, în special în regiunea Mării Negre, reflectă, totodată, și o combinație complexă de factori structurali, instituționali și politici ce pot fi angrenați în dezvoltarea coerentă și sustenabilă a acestui sector și în compensarea unei eventuale capacități administrative limitate, identificate la începutul acestui proiect.

În vederea consolidării protecției și rezilienței ICS din regiunea Mării Negre, ca posibile căi de acțiune pe viitor, pot fi luate în considerare următoarele:

- Susținerea ca obiectiv strategic și politic pe agenda NATO a unei misiuni de patrulare și descurajare a alianței, coordonată de MARCOM în Marea Neagră, cu comandă rotațională similară cu cea din Marea Baltică;

- Dezvoltarea unui sistem de capabilități privind ICS în cadrul procesului de planificarea aliată (Nato Defence Planning Process) și introducerea acestuia în viitorul pachet de ținte de capabilități 2029, asumat de România;

- Implementarea unui *Centru de Acțiune ICS* la nivel guvernamental, similar cu cel al Estoniei, care integrează atât componenta strategică, politică, de intelligence, militară, cât și pe cea legislativă, într-un cadru unitar operativ, în vederea consolidării capacității administrative și asigurării unei planificări strategice pe termen lung;

- Adaptări legislative în vederea sincronizării legislației interne cu cea internațională privind prezența actorilor privați economici și responsabilitatea aliatului ca stat, văzută în mod unitar pe întregul domeniu al ICS;

- Menținerea angajamentului de creare a unui Centru European de Securitate Maritimă la Marea Neagră, cel mai probabil la Constanța – un hub strategic pentru apărare, economie și stabilitate, care va consolida securitatea maritimă, protecția ICS, combaterea amenințărilor hibride și a dezinformării, cu accent pe următorii piloni: consolidarea securității, sprijin economic, răspuns la amenințări și investiții UE.²⁵

Note

¹ Sean Monaghan, Otto Svendsen, Michael Darrah, și Ed Arnold, *NATO's Role in Protecting Critical Undersea Infrastructure*, disponibil pe www.nato.int, 22 decembrie 2025.

² Disponibil pe www.nato.int, accesat la 15 decembrie 2025.

³ Securitatea maritimă este esențială pentru pacea și prosperitatea noastră. Ne vom consolida poziția și cunoașterea situației (situational awareness) pentru a descuraja și a ne apăra împotriva tuturor amenințărilor din domeniul maritim, pentru a susține libertatea de navigație, pentru a securiza rutele comerciale maritime și pentru a proteja principalele linii de comunicații.

⁴ Disponibilă pe www.nato.int, accesat la 15 decembrie 2025.

⁵ Implicațiile în materie de securitate și apărare ale influenței Chinei asupra infrastructurii critice din Uniunea Europeană au fost evidențiate inclusiv în Rezoluția Parlamentului European din 17 ianuarie 2024.

⁶ Un exemplu explicit îl reprezintă cablurile submarine aflate în proprietatea privată a companiei HNM Technologies, entitate presupus afiliată serviciilor de informații cibernetice ale armatei chineze, utilizate pentru sprijinirea comunicațiilor diplomatice și militare ale multor state europene aliate.

⁷ Astfel, China a devenit o amenințare emergentă și prin deținerea unor drepturi de proprietate în 31 de terminale portuare din Europa, fiind acționar majoritar în porturile Pireu și Zeebrugge și acționar minoritar în alte porturi europene importante.

⁸ George Marinescu, *China cucerește infrastructura portuară din Europa*, în „Bursa”, 29 iulie 2024.

⁹ Implicațiile în materie de securitate și apărare ale influenței Chinei asupra infrastructurii critice din Uniunea Europeană au fost evidențiate inclusiv în Rezoluția Parlamentului European din 17 ianuarie 2024.

¹⁰ Reprezintă o strategie de dezvoltare globală a infrastructurii, adoptată de guvernul chinez în 2023 pentru investiții în mai mult de 150 de state și organizații. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) este compusă din șase coridoare terestre, asociate infrastructurii digitale, terestre, feroviare și energetice, precum și componente maritime „Maritime Silk Road”, destinate dezvoltării de porturi. Inițiativa este considerată piesa centrală a politicii externe a lui Xi Jinping.

¹¹ Comisia Europeană, Grupul operativ UE-NATO privind reziliența infrastructurii critice. Raportul final de evaluare, iunie 2023.

¹² Conducta Balticconnector a fost deschisă în decembrie 2019 între Finlanda și Estonia, având

o secțiune submarină care traversează Goful Finlandei. Scopul proiectului a fost facilitarea integrării piețelor de gaze naturale din regiunea baltică – Finlanda, Estonia, Letonia și Lituania – și creșterea flexibilității în aprovizionare. Balticconnector a devenit vital pentru Finlanda după încetarea importului de gaz rusec.

¹³ www.nato.int, accesat 19 decembrie 2025.

¹⁴ Ulterior, a fost recuperată o ancoră despre care s-a presupus că a provocat deteriorarea cablurilor submarine de energie și telecomunicații dintre cele două state.

¹⁵ George Allison, *What is Baltic Sentry and why does it matter?* în „UK Defence Journal”, disponibil pe <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/what-is-baltic-sentry-and-why-does-it-matter/>, accesat la 18 decembrie 2025.

¹⁶ Marius Bătcă, *Digital Ocean Vision – o nouă eră a apărării maritime în NATO*, în *Observatorul Militar* nr. 27/2025, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Idem* 18. Mai explicit, jocul de război a testat și capacitatea de integrare a unei vaste rețele de senzori și platforme de analiză a datelor pentru a crea o imagine completă a ceea ce se desfășoară atât în ocean, cât și în aer, rezultatul fiind o supraveghere persistentă prin monitorizarea mișcărilor submarinelor adverse, a traficului ilegal, a pescuitului nereglementat și a potențialelor amenințări cibernetice la adresa infrastructurii maritime. Un alt element testat a fost o gamă largă de sisteme, de la cele de asistență pentru luarea deciziilor bazate pe inteligența artificială, până la vehicule submarine, asigurând un sistem coerent care îmbunătățește procesul decizional, detectarea amenințărilor și răspunsul operațional.

¹⁸ România este națiune-sponsor împreună cu Grecia, iar Turcia este națiune-cadru.

¹⁹ Forțele Navale Române au participat la MCNBS TG cu puitorul de mine și plase 274 „Vice-amiral Constantin Bălescu”, în calitate de navă-co-mandant, și cu vânătorul de mine M270 „Sublocotenent Ion Ghiculescu”.

²⁰ La fel ca în jurul Kaliningradului.

²¹ Mircea Iulian, *Statele Unite testează o rachetă capabilă să distrugă sisteme Anti-Acces/ Interdicție zonală (A2AD), precum cele din Crimeea*, Umbrela Strategică, disponibil pe <https://umbrela-strategica.ro/statele-unite-testeaza-o-racheta-capabila-sa-distruga-sisteme-anti-acces-interdictie-zonala-a2ad-precum-cele-din-crimea>, accesat la 27 decembrie 2025.

²² Cu un volum total de gaze naturale estimat la 100 de miliarde de metri cubi, Neptun Deep va poziționa România drept cel mai mare producător de gaze naturale din UE, înaintea Norvegiei.

²³ *Neptun Deep – O Românie mai puternică. Cu energie din Marea Neagră*, disponibil pe <https://www.omvpetrom.com/ro/despre-noi/ce-facem/proiecte/neptun-deep>, accesat la 23 decembrie 2025.

²⁴ Carmen Radu, *România se alătură UE și SUA în securizarea cablurilor submarine vitale*, în *Economedia*, disponibil pe <https://economedia.ro/romania-se-alatura-ue-si-sua-in-securizarea-cablurilor-submarine-vitale.html>, accesat la 27 decembrie 2025.

²⁵ www.calea.europeana.ro, accesat la 28 decembrie 2025.

Evoluția relațiilor turco-israeliene, 2006-2026

Andrei-Cristian FLORE

Abstract

As tensions continue to rise across the Middle East, the evolution of Turkish-Israeli relations has become increasingly significant. This article examines the origins of the growing rivalry between Ankara and Tel Aviv. Following electoral victory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, Türkiye adopted a more active foreign policy characterised by increased engagement with Middle Eastern states, grounded in cultural and religious affinities. Meanwhile, Israel continued to view its regional environment with distrust, perceiving it as a persistent source of hostility. As the two states pursued increasingly divergent foreign policy agendas, two major crises emerged: Erdoğan's confrontation with Shimon Peres at the 2009 Davos Forum and the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. Tensions persisted throughout the Arab Spring, interrupted only briefly by a period of rapprochement following Netanyahu's phone call to Ankara in 2013. However, the trend of deteriorating relations intensified once again after the fall of the Assad regime in late 2024.

Keywords: Türkiye, Israel, Middle East, foreign policy, tensions

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Evoluția relației dintre Turcia și Israel reprezintă un subiect de interes major, prin impactul pe care îl are asupra Orientului Mijlociu, dar și asupra regiunilor adiacente. În contextul Războiului Rece, parteneriatul strategic dintre Tel Aviv și Ankara a transformat Turcia într-un element-cheie al strategiei de securitate israeliene. Colaborarea dintre cele două state în perioada postbelică a fost dictată de necesitatea contracarării a două fenomene destabilizatoare: ascensiunea naționalismului panarab sub egida lui Gamal Abdel Nasser și amenințarea expansionismului sovietic.¹

Articolul își propune să analizeze evoluția relațiilor turco-israeliene în ultimele două decenii, depășind cadrul strict bilateral. Pentru o mai bună înțelegere a dinamicii dintre cele două state, este necesară și o analiză a pozițiilor adoptate de Ankara și Tel Aviv față de crizele din Orientul Mijlociu, precum și a interacțiunilor acestora cu alți actori regionali.

De o importanță majoră este și rolul actorilor non-statali, precum Hamas și grupările kurde. Lucrarea va evidenția modul în care convergența fiecărui stat cu actori percepuți de cealaltă parte drept ostili a amplificat rivalitatea strategică turco-israeliană.

Alegerea acestei abordări este justificată prin faptul că erodarea raporturilor turco-israeliene generează implicații care depășesc relația directă dintre cele două state. Prin urmare, se impune o analiză a contextului regional, a relațiilor cu terți actori și a tensiunilor generate de ambițiile asumate de administrațiile ambelor state.

Pornind de la aceste premise și utilizând metoda analizei istorice, completată cu abordarea geopolitică, precum și analiza de discurs și studiul de caz, cercetarea de față se bazează pe următoarele ipoteze de lucru:

- Rivalitatea dintre Israel și Turcia s-a accentuat pe fondul restructurării geopolitice

a Orientului Mijlociu după începutul anilor 2000.

- Relațiile turco-israeliene s-au degradat progresiv în ultimele două decenii, iar căderea regimului Assad a deschis o nouă etapă de competiție strategică, prin extinderea influenței turce în proximitatea frontierei israeliene.

- Pe măsura deteriorării relațiilor bilaterale, ambele state au dezvoltat relații mai apropiate cu actori percepuți de cealaltă parte drept amenințări strategice, incluzând atât actori statali, cât și non-statali.

I. Premisele deteriorării relației dintre Turcia și Israel

Obiectivul acestei secțiuni este analiza perspectivelor strategice ale Turciei și Israelului asupra Orientului Mijlociu. Într-o primă etapă este necesară examinarea peisajului politic de la începutul secolului XXI, pentru a înțelege modul în care cele două state și-au definit viziunile de politică externă. Demersul permite identificarea premiselor care au modelat traiectoria ulterioară a relațiilor bilaterale. Totodată, secțiunea explorează interacțiunile acestora cu diverși actori regionali, punând accent pe punctele în care abordările Ankarei și ale Tel Avivului devin divergente.

Statul Israel a fost fondat sub influența mișcării sioniste, al cărei scop era crearea unui stat pentru poporul evreu. Acest curent ideologic se împarte, la rândul său, în mai multe ramuri: laburistă, revizionistă și religioasă.² La sfârșitul secolului XX și începutul secolului XXI, o parte importantă a liderilor israelieni a provenit din partide de orientare revizionistă. Cei mai relevanți pentru evoluțiile din Orientul Mijlociu și, implicit, pentru relația cu Turcia au fost Ariel Sharon și Benjamin Netanyahu. Ambii fac parte din partidul Likud, asociat sionismului revizionist, și au promovat o viziune politică axată pe securitatea și consolidarea poziției regionale a Israelului.³

La începutul anilor 2000, noul prim-ministru al Israelului era Ariel Sharon. Alegerea sa a marcat o schimbare pe scena politică israeliană, prin trecerea de la un guvern de stânga la unul de dreapta. Politica externă și de se-

curitate a noii administrații de la Tel Aviv era una fermă, orientată spre acțiuni preventive. Sharon, fost militar, participase la principalele războaie ale Israelului, iar sub administrația sa s-au consolidat elemente ale unei doctrine de securitate axate pe stoparea proliferării nucleare în rândul statelor rivale, inclusiv prin acțiuni militare preventive, și pe menținerea superiorității tehnologice față de vecinii săi.⁴ Un alt mijloc prin care Israelul a urmărit să-și asigure securitatea a fost relația specială cu Statele Unite. Pentru a obține sprijin constant din partea Washingtonului, Tel Avivul a beneficiat și de influența AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee). Astfel, Israelul a reușit să securizeze sprijinul american pentru atingerea obiectivelor sale strategice.⁵

Relația cu Turcia s-a tensionat pe fondul noii orientări a administrației Erdoğan în ceea ce privește politica externă. Implicarea Ankarei în Orientul Mijlociu a început să contravină intereselor israeliene, mai ales după victoria Partidului Justiție și Dezvoltare (AKP), în 2002. Noua abordare a pus accent pe „moștenirea istorică” a fostului Imperiu Otoman ca instrument de soft power. Astfel, Ankara a trecut la o politică externă proactivă, încercând să devină un pilon de stabilitate și prosperitate regională. Aceste ambiții, definite prin politica „Zero probleme cu vecinii”, au vizat recalibrarea raporturilor cu actori-cheie precum Siria, Irakul și Iranul.⁶

Pe plan extern, din 2002, administrația Erdoğan a fost preocupată, în mod activ, de implicarea Turciei în Orientul Mijlociu pe multiple planuri, statul prezentându-se drept un reper de stabilitate în regiune. Succesul acestui model se baza pe simbioza dintre un regim democratic, prosperitate economică și valorile unei majorități musulmane. Un alt avantaj era relația specială dintre Ankara și Bruxelles, ce a contribuit la îmbunătățirea imaginii Turciei, care se putea prezenta drept intermediar între lumea arabă și Uniunea Europeană.⁷ Unul dintre cei mai importanți pași făcuți de Ankara a fost deschiderea economică spre țările arabe. În anii 2000, Turcia a semnat acorduri de eliminare a vizelor și de liberalizare comercială cu mai multe state din regiune, printre care Iordania, Libanul și Siria.⁸

Două evenimente au reprezentat atât pentru Turcia, cât și pentru Israel, o schimbare majoră în dinamica regională: atacurile de la 11 septembrie 2001 și invazia Irakului din 2003. Atacul asupra Turnurilor Gemene a sporit atenția acordată de Statele Unite Orientului Mijlociu. Washingtonul a declanșat un război „împotriva terorii”, invocând drept *casus belli* sponsorizarea terorismului internațional de către anumite regimuri din regiune. Administrația Bush a promovat un discurs prin care susținea „eliberarea” popoarelor din Asia de Vest și răspândirea democrației.⁹ Noua poziție adoptată de Washington reprezenta o oportunitate atât pentru Ankara, cât și pentru Tel Aviv. Pe de o parte, Israelul beneficia de implicarea americană împotriva adversarilor săi. Pe de altă parte, Turcia avea oportunitatea de a-și folosi statutul de membru NATO pentru dezvoltarea relațiilor cu alte state din regiune, prezentându-se drept un posibil garant de securitate. Unul dintre motivele pentru care numeroase state din regiune au optat pentru relații mai apropiate cu Turcia a fost dorința de a evita un scenariu similar celui irakian.¹⁰

II. De la războiul din Liban până la incidentul Mavi Marmara

Această secțiune urmărește parcursul relației turco-israeliene, folosind drept repere cronologice două evenimente importante pentru ambele state: războiul din Liban din 2006 și incidentul Mavi Marmara din 2010. Vor fi analizate poziționările diferite ale celor două țări față de alți actori statali și non-statali. De asemenea, este important să evaluăm în ce măsură interacțiunile cu diverse entități au avut impact asupra relațiilor turco-israeliene.

În vara anului 2006, Israelul s-a angajat într-un conflict cu gruparea paramilitară Hezbollah. Armata israeliană a eșuat în atingerea obiectivelor propuse, iar performanța modestă a Forțelor de Apărare ale Israelului (IDF) a generat temeri importante în rândul conducerii militare în ceea ce privește reziliența trupelor în fața artileriei siriene.¹¹ Relevanța acestui aspect pentru relația dintre Tel Aviv și Ankara rezidă în divergența de percepție stra-

tegică: în timp ce Turcia, din dorința de a-și asuma rolul de lider regional, urmărea o apropiere diplomatică de Siria, Israelul continua să identifice amenințări existențiale în actori pe care Ankara îi evaluase deja drept posibili parteneri. Aceste viziuni antagonice au marcat începutul distanțării progresive dintre cele două state.¹²

O grupare controversată cu care Turcia a dezvoltat relații politice este Hamas. Trebuie remarcat faptul că legăturile dintre politicienii turci și ramura palestiniană a Frăției Musulmane preced administrația Erdoğan. Acestea au fost inițiate de Necmettin Erbakan, prin Partidul Bunăstării, care invita reprezentanți ai Hamas la evenimentele sale politice.¹³ Această filieră a islamismului politic a contribuit la cristalizarea unei preferințe pentru sprijinirea cauzei palestinienilor. Identificarea originii acestei afinități demonstrează existența unei simpatii față de acest curent în societatea turcă, ceea ce i-a dăruit lui Erdoğan un segment electoral consistent, oferind legitimitate și susținere continuării acestor relații. În 2006, alegerile din Fâșia Gaza au adus Hamas la conducere. Turcia a recunoscut legitimitatea politică a acestor alegeri, considerând rezultatul drept un simbol al voinței poporului palestinian. Pentru a-și arăta susținerea, administrația Erdoğan l-a primit pe liderul Hamas la Ankara. Pe lângă sprijinul politic, Turcia a contribuit la supraviețuirea noii autorități printr-un ajutor umanitar indirect, deoarece a permis ONG-urilor turce să-și extindă operațiunile umanitare în Palestina.¹⁴

Relația dintre Israel și Hamas este definită de un conflict perpetuu, întrerupt de armistiții fragile, gruparea fiind catalogată de israelieni drept organizație teroristă. Pentru Tel Aviv, această formațiune, apărută ca o consecință directă a Primei Intifade, reprezintă o amenințare majoră.¹⁵ În cartă Mișcării de Rezistență Islamică, prin articolul 13, este subliniată inutilitatea conferințelor internaționale în soluționarea conflictului israeliano-palestinian.

Din perspectiva Hamas, lupta armată reprezintă singura modalitate de a face dreptate populației palestinienilor, iar statul Israel este considerat o entitate ilegală, care a uzurpat pământul Palestinei. În retorica Hamas sunt folosite elemente de natură istorică și

religioasă, cel mai important fiind luptele cu cruciații. Ierusalimul este revendicat de Hamas, deoarece găzduiește moscheea Al-Aqsa, unul dintre locurile sfinte ale islamului, al treilea ca importanță.¹⁶

Prin obiectivele fiecărei părți, relația dintre Israel și Mișcarea de Rezistență Islamică tinde să genereze un conflict de durată, dacă abordarea ambelor tabere nu se va schimba.

Relația cu Republica Islamică Iran constituie o altă diferență majoră între Turcia și Israel. Teheranul este catalogat drept o amenințare existențială de cel din urmă. În discursul politic israelian, Iranul este comparat adesea cu Germania nazistă a secolului XXI. Mai mult, pe lângă construirea imaginii unui stat genocidar și antisemit, politicienii israelieni pun accent pe pericolul nuclear reprezentat de Teheran. Încă de la începutul anilor 2000, a existat un efort din partea Israelului, în cooperare cu AIPAC, pentru a convinge administrația Bush de amenințarea pe care un Iran cu arme de distrugere în masă ar reprezenta-o pentru lume. De asemenea, guvernul israelian, împreună cu lobbyul pro-israelian din Statele Unite, a continuat să susțină necesitatea schimbării regimului iranian. Politica iraniană față de Israel implică susținerea unor grupări armate ostile acestuia și o retorică agresivă, care contestă legitimitatea existenței statului evreu.¹⁷

Spre deosebire de Israel, Iranul nu reprezintă pentru Turcia o amenințare existențială, ci mai degrabă o oportunitate. În primul rând, Ankara urmărește securizarea resurselor energetice necesare consumului intern, iar vecinul său de la răsărit dispune de resurse energetice semnificative. Prin urmare, din perspectiva intereselor sale, Ankara urmărește să evite, pe cât posibil, eventuale neînțelegeri în relația cu Iranul.¹⁸ De asemenea, și Teheranul se folosește de poziția Turciei ca intermediar în transportul gazelor către piața europeană. Astfel, din perspectiva relațiilor economice, inclusiv în domeniul energetic, volumul schimburilor comerciale dintre Turcia și Iran a înregistrat o creștere semnificativă pe parcursul a nouă ani.¹⁹ În ceea ce privește problema nucleară iraniană, Ankara a adoptat o poziție mult mai tolerantă decât Tel Avivul, cu mențiunea ca programul nuclear al Teheranului să fie folosit strict în scop civil. Opoziția Turciei față de

fabricarea armelor de distrugere în masă de către Iran este determinată de riscul destabilizării regionale și al apariției unui conflict intern, având în vedere vasta diversitate etnică a vecinului său.²⁰

Între Israel și Siria exista un precedent de negocieri, desfășurate în scopul normalizării relațiilor, dar mediate de Statele Unite. Acest proces a avut loc în timpul mandatului lui Ehud Barak și al conducerii lui Hafez al-Assad, iar rolul de mediator a fost asumat de președintele Statelor Unite, Bill Clinton. Negocierile au înregistrat un eșec, iar din perspectiva mediatorului responsabilitatea aparținea, în principal, părții israeliene.²¹

La sfârșitul anului 2006, Turcia încă se bucura de o relație suficient de bună cu Israelul, în special din punct de vedere economic, pentru ca Ankara să fie acceptată în rolul de mediator.²² Rezultatul acestor negocieri a fost însă modest, dialogul fiind suspendat în 2007, în urma bombardării unui reactor nuclear de pe teritoriul Siriei de către israelieni. Se poate constata că Tel Avivul a decis să-și continue politica preventivă de împiedicare a proliferării nucleare, în detrimentul discuțiilor de pace.²³ Abandonarea negocierilor s-a produs definitiv în 2009, când IDF a lansat o ofensivă împotriva Fâșiei Gaza.²⁴ Lipsa de cooperare a Israelului a afectat imaginea Turciei ca mediator, ceea ce a dus la deteriorarea relației bilaterale. Cel mai probabil, administrația Olmert a utilizat acest proces de normalizare a relațiilor cu Siria ca o oportunitate pentru a reduce capacitatea Damascului de a anticipa un atac israelian.

Diferențele de abordare față de actorii regionali menționați au dus la o confruntare diplomatică între Turcia și Israel. Evenimentul care a marcat debutul degradării vizibile a relației dintre cele două state s-a produs într-un cadru internațional, unde întreaga lume a putut urmări disputa. În 2009, la Forumul Economic Mondial de la Davos, premierul Turciei, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, l-a criticat public pe președintele Israelului, Shimon Peres. Tonul ostil a fost determinat de ofensiva israeliană asupra Fâșiei Gaza din 2008-2009. Astfel, Turcia s-a plasat în solidaritate cu lumea arabă, consolidându-și poziția în regiune, în detrimentul relației cu Israelul.²⁵ Se poate constata că o asemenea confruntare devenise tot mai probabilă, având

în vedere divergențele apărute între cele două părți.

Schimbul de replici de la Davos nu avea să fie singura problemă din relația turco-israeliană. Un incident mult mai grav avea să producă o ruptură majoră. În urma deciziei statului turc de a permite ONG-urilor să-și continue și să-și extindă ajutorul pentru Palestina, în anul 2010 acestea au format o flotilă civilă cu misiune umanitară. Scopul său era să ajungă în Fâșia Gaza pentru a oferi ajutor alimentar și medical populației palestiniene. Traseul a fost însă întrerupt brutal de forțele armate israeliene. Nu doar intervenția Israelului a deranjat statul turc, ci modul în care aceasta a fost realizată. Evenimentul avea să fie cunoscut drept incidentul de pe Mavi Marmara și a fost marcat de uciderea unor cetățeni turci aflați la bordul unei nave civile de către trupe de comando israeliene, motivul fiind că aceștia au opus rezistență. Prin urmare, cooperarea militară a fost suspendată, dar nu și cea economică. Astfel, episodul Mavi Marmara poate fi considerat momentul în care degradarea relațiilor turco-israeliene a devenit ireparabilă pe termen scurt.²⁶

Israelul a decis să aplice strategia de periferie statal, alegând să dezvolte relațiile cu Grecia și Cipru, ceea ce poate fi interpretat ca un mesaj transmis Ankarei.²⁷ În același an, în care s-a petrecut incidentul Mavi Marmara, 2010, a avut loc o vizită oficială între prim-ministrul Greciei și Israelului, George Papandreu și Benjamin Netanyahu. Drept urmare, s-a fondat un mecanism bilateral menit să identifice domenii în care cooperarea greco-israeliană putea fi dezvoltată și s-a stabilit o colaborare pe plan militar, Grecia achiziționând echipament israelian. Faptul că Republica Elenă percepea Ankara ca pe o amenințare a transformat răcirea relațiilor turco-israeliene într-o oportunitate pentru Grecia.

Pe lângă cooperarea militară, Atena și Tel Avivul și-au extins parteneriatul în domeniul energetic, împreună cu Cipru. Astfel a apărut o divergență majoră, pentru că Turcia nu recunoaște Republica Cipru și, implicit, revendică o parte din Zona Economică Exclusivă a Nicosiei.²⁸

Se poate constata că Israelul s-a re poziționat strategic prin consolidarea relațiilor cu

Grecia și Cipru, doi actori aflați în raporturi tensionate cu Ankara. Scopul principal al acestui parteneriat poate fi considerat acela de a crea un traseu alternativ, capabil să concureze rolul Turciei ca stat de tranzit energetic și să diminueze importanța pârgheii strategice pe care aceasta o are în regiune și în relația cu Europa. De asemenea, prin cooperarea militară cu Grecia, Israelul contribuie la consolidarea capacităților de apărare ale unui stat care percepe Turcia drept o amenințare.

III. Izbucnirea Primăverii Arabe și momente importante pentru Turcia și Israel

Această secțiune analizează evoluția relațiilor turco-israeliene în contextul Primăverii Arabe și al schimbărilor, generate de aceasta ulterior. De asemenea, este prezentat modul în care Turcia și Israelul s-au raportat la anumiți actori din regiune, în special Siria și kurzii, precum și impactul acestor interacțiuni asupra relației dintre cele două state.

În ciuda eforturilor depuse de Turcia în politica sa externă, poziția de care se bucura în Asia de Vest s-a schimbat după 2011. Dacă relația cu Siria era atât de strânsă încât cele două state efectuau exerciții militare comune și aveau granițe deschise, în special în scop economic, Primăvara Arabă avea să aducă o schimbare fundamentală.²⁹ Când protestele au izbucnit în Siria, administrația Erdoğan a încercat să convingă regimul Assad să adopte o abordare conciliatoare față de opoziție, inclusiv prin oferirea unei reprezentări parlamentare. Damascul a refuzat ingerințele administrației Erdoğan, iar rezultatul a fost susținerea masivă a opoziției siriene de către Ankara. Turcia a găzduit membri ai Armatei Libere Siriene și a organizat forțele rebele din punct de vedere militar.³⁰ Se poate observa astfel că doctrina „Zero probleme cu vecinii” nu s-a mai materializat în cazul Siriei. Totuși, trebuie remarcat că acest eșec a fost amplificat de un fenomen pe care Turcia nu l-a putut controla. Faptul că relațiile dintre Ankara și vecinii săi s-au deteriorat, în urma unui eveniment neprevăzut, indică un nivel de cooperare destul de

ridicat între cele două țări, care a fost anulat de evenimentele specifice Primăverii Arabe.

Pentru Israel, ruperea relațiilor de cooperare dintre administrația Erdoğan și regimul Assad a constituit un eveniment geopolitic favorabil. Nici forțele de opoziție din Siria nu ofereau o perspectivă de bună vecinătate, având în vedere orientarea islamistă a multor grupări, uneori chiar radicală.³¹ Siria era o componentă importantă a alianței regionale a Iranului, numită Axa de Rezistență, și era vitală pentru aprovizionarea logistică a grupării Hezbollah.³² Astfel, se poate constata că Tel Avivul era avantajat de un război civil prelungit în Siria, care exercita presiune asupra Iranului. Poate că, pentru Israel, cel mai important aspect a fost modul în care Teheranul și Ankara s-au poziționat în tabere opuse, într-un război prin intermediari. În timpul acestui conflict s-a realizat un pas înainte în relația turco-israeliană, prin vizita președintelui american Barrack Obama, în anul 2013, unde s-a întâlnit cu omologul său, Benjamin Netanyahu. În cadrul acestei întrevederi, partea israeliană a fost convinsă să-și prezinte scuzele oficiale pentru incidentul Mavi Marmara, fapt ce s-a realizat printr-o convorbire telefonică³³, gest care poate fi interpretat drept un efort de reapropiere diplomatică. Totuși, conjunctura regională a facilitat și ea această convorbire dintre cei doi lideri. Turcia se poziționase împotriva unui fost partener, Siria, condusă de Assad, și ducea o luptă prin intermediari cu Iranul, ambele state fiind considerate amenințări de Israel. Prin urmare, se poate considera că efortul de reapropiere s-a datorat și faptului că Ankara s-a angajat într-un conflict împotriva unor adversari ai Tel Avivului.

Există un subiect de divergență în relația turco-israeliană care, deși precedă cu mult Primăvara Arabă, a devenit și mai tensionat din cauza instabilității regionale: chestiunea kurdă. Pe de o parte, aceasta reprezintă pentru Turcia o vulnerabilitate internă care îi poate afecta integritatea națională. Pe de altă parte, pentru israelieni, kurzii constituie un posibil partener periferic, care ar putea fi utilizat împotriva statelor considerate ostile și care găzduiesc populații kurde.³⁴

Tel Avivul era interesat de mult timp de intensificarea colaborării cu kurzii, iar interesul

era reciproc. În gândirea strategică israeliană, sprijinul acordat kurzilor pentru constituirea unui stat kurd independent a fost luat în calcul ca opțiune geopolitică. Populația care ar forma, ipotetic, un asemenea stat ocupă regiuni din patru țări: Iran, Siria, Irak și, mai ales, Turcia. În urma Războiului din Golf, în nordul Irakului s-a constituit o entitate autonomă kurdă, care a încercat să obțină susținerea Israelului ca mijloc pentru consolidarea propriei independențe.³⁵

Războiul civil sirian a reprezentat o altă oportunitate de extindere a relațiilor israelo-kurde. Astfel, există indicii că Tel Avivul a stabilit contacte cu People's Defence Units (YPG), o grupare kurdă din nord-estul Siriei. Una dintre motivațiile susținerii acestei facțiuni era performanța sa tactică împotriva Daesh (ISIS). Astfel, Israelul a trimis ajutor umanitar către kurzii sirieni, dar a desfășurat și operațiuni de colectare de informații de pe teritoriul controlat de această grupare.³⁶

În percepția factorilor decizionali de la Ankara, kurzii constituie o vulnerabilitate internă încă de la fondarea statului modern turc.³⁷ Chestiunea kurdă a luat amploare după războaiele din Golf și după izbucnirea războiului civil din Siria, aceste evenimente ducând la apariția unor zone autonome kurde. Ankara era ostilă ideii de cooperare dintre Israel și kurzi, astfel încât, la nivelul serviciilor de informații, Turcia a notificat Teheranul cu privire la întâlnirile dintre kurzii din Iran și Mossad, care s-ar fi desfășurat pe teritoriul turc.³⁸ Este evident că Turcia se opune creării unui stat kurd și că este direct interesată să împiedice stabilirea unui asemenea stat, deoarece astfel conștiința națională kurdă s-ar putea trezi, ceea ce ar putea duce la o „Primăvară a popoarelor” în Asia de Vest, crescând considerabil nivelul de instabilitate al regiunii.

Într-adevăr, kurzii speră să-și obțină independența, inclusiv prin parteneriatul de securitate cu Israelul, însă acest sprijin nu este suficient. În 2017 a avut loc un eveniment care a demonstrat vulnerabilitatea kurzilor din Irak, motivați de ambiția de a-și obține independența națională. Liderul lor, Masoud Barzani, a organizat un referendum consultativ pentru independență, în care 93% dintre votanți s-au pronunțat pentru obținerea independenței.

Reacția externă a fost promptă: Turcia, Iranul și Irakul au mobilizat forțe armate la graniță și au închis spațiul aerian. Drept urmare, liderul kurzilor și-a cerut oficial scuze și a recunoscut că referendumul a fost ilegal.³⁹ Trebuie subliniat că există un consens între Ankara și statele împotriva cărora Tel Avivul ar putea utiliza factorul kurd. Astfel, o susținere prea puternică a cauzei kurde din partea Israelului ar putea duce la relații mai strânse între Turcia și state precum Iranul, Irakul și Siria.

IV. Situația post-Assad

Ultima secțiune a acestui articol expune stadiul recent al relațiilor turco-israeliene. Siria, sub regimul Assad, era o componentă vitală din punct de vedere logistic pentru Axa de Rezistență, iar schimbarea regimului a reprezentat o pierdere majoră pentru Iran. Astfel, trebuie analizat modul în care noul regim, ajuns la putere cu sprijinul Ankarei, a influențat relația turco-israeliană.

Atât Turcia, cât și Israelul, au avut de câștigat în urma colapsului regimului Assad. Însă, după cum am menționat anterior, deși răsturnarea conducerii din Siria a constituit un punct comun pe agenda ambelor state, divergențele dintre ele erau considerabil mai numeroase. Sprijinul pe care Ankara l-a oferit forțelor de opoziție din Siria a fost indispensabil pentru grupările rebele, inclusiv pentru Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), care controlează astăzi Damascul sub conducerea noului lider, Ahmed al-Sharaa, cunoscut anterior ca Muhammad Abu al-Jolani.⁴⁰ Influența Turciei a putut fi observată într-un timp foarte scurt. Imediat după instaurarea noului regim, au început negocieri privind un acord de cooperare în domeniul apărării, iar Turcia a plasat echipament militar în Siria. De asemenea, influența Ankarei este dezvăluită și de afirmația ministrului turc de externe, Hakan Fidan, potrivit căreia milițiile din cadrul Armatei Naționale Siriene vor fuziona cu HTS pentru a forma o nouă forță armată.⁴¹ Astfel, Turcia depune un efort vizibil pentru consolidarea noii conduceri din Siria, prin sprijinirea procesului de restructurare militară.

Colapsul regimului Assad a reprezentat și o oportunitate pentru expansiune teritorială.

Profitând de fereastra de oportunitate oferită de haosul politic, Israelul a intrat în sudul Siriei cu scopul de a crea o zonă tampon și de a-și spori securitatea la frontiera nordică. Pe lângă extinderea zonei de control din apropierea Înălțimilor Golan, Tel Avivul a desfășurat acțiuni ofensive care pot fi interpretate drept o demilitarizare limitată a statului sirian. Astfel, Forțele Aeriene Israeliene au lansat atacuri asupra Siriei, distrugând echipamente antiaeriene.⁴² În timp ce Turcia urmărește consolidarea statului sirian, Israelul pare determinat să-l mențină vulnerabil din punct de vedere militar, întrucât nu își dorește un vecin puternic, care să reprezinte un pericol pentru securitatea sa. Reiese astfel că un obiectiv al gândirii strategice israeliene este menținerea unui nivel redus al capacităților militare ale Siriei.

Retorica și răspunsurile diplomatice nu au întârziat să apară în urma acțiunilor întreprinse de ambele state. Ministrul turc de externe, Hakan Fidan, a condamnat pătrunderea Israelului în sudul Siriei, catalogând-o drept agresivă și expansionistă, Ankara contestând astfel afirmațiile Israelului, potrivit cărora, acțiunile sale ar fi fost motivate exclusiv de asigurarea propriei securități. Oficialul turc a declarat că Tel Avivul are un plan de destabilizare a regiunii, în special a vecinilor săi: Siria, Libanul și Iordania.⁴³ Prin urmare, Turcia portretizează Israelul drept o entitate statală cu tendințe expansioniste, care comite acțiuni contrare dreptului internațional. Pentru a consolida această percepție, Ankara lansează și ideea existenței unei amenințări la adresa vecinilor Israelului, conform căreia Tel Avivul ar avea planuri ce ar putea afecta integritatea teritorială a acestora.

În Israel există mai multe voci care critică dur în spațiul public acțiunile Turciei în Siria, concomitent cu justificarea propriilor măsuri. Una dintre cele mai relevante poziții este cea a ministrului apărării, Israel Katz, care a declarat că acțiunea Tel Avivului are la bază prevenirea instalării unor trupe ostile pe teritoriul sirian. De asemenea, există și un punct similar cu discursul oficialilor turci: acuzația conform căreia Turcia urmărește transformarea Siriei într-un protectorat, ceea ce implică o formă de expansionism.⁴⁴ Declarația oficialului israelian reflectă schimbarea produsă în Siria. Damascul a ieșit din Axa de Rezistență,

dar prezența iraniană a fost înlocuită cu cea turcă, iar Tel Avivul nu are de gând să permită consolidarea puterii statale în Siria, mai ales dacă aceasta servește intereselor turce.

Dincolo de Siria și de declarațiile oficialilor de stat, un alt eveniment recent indică degradarea relațiilor turco-israeliene. După cum am arătat anterior, Israelul a decis să extindă aria în care va aplica strategia sa de periferie. Astfel, pentru a descuraja Turcia, Israelul, împreună cu Grecia și Cipru, poartă un dialog strategic privind alcătuirea unei forțe de reacție rapidă. De asemenea, înaintea discuțiilor generate de această inițiativă, Ankara a observat cu atenție creșterea volumului importurilor de echipament militar israelian de către Nicosia. Prin urmare, în estul Mediteranei se conturează premisele unei posibile confruntări militare indirecte. Din observarea acestor acțiuni se poate concluziona că Israelul are intenția de a forma un cordon strategic în jurul Ankarei, folosindu-se de animozitatea greco-turcă. Aceste acțiuni ar trebui să constituie un semnal de alarmă, în special pentru NATO. Un aliat este utilizat pentru descurajarea altuia de către un stat din afara organizației. În cazul unui posibil conflict între Turcia și Israel, există posibilitatea, chiar redusă, ca Grecia să sprijine Israelul împotriva unui aliat din NATO. Un asemenea eveniment poate avea loc dacă dialogul strategic dintre Tel Aviv, Atena și Nicosia duce la crearea forței de reacție rapidă.⁴⁵

Prin urmare, în Estul Mediteranei există posibilitatea unei confruntări militare. Se observă în urma acestor acțiuni că Israel are intenția de a forma un cordon strategic în jurul Ankarei, utilizând animozitatea greco-turcă. Acest scenariu este un semnal de alarmă, în special pentru NATO. Un aliat tinde să fie utilizat drept factor de descurajare împotriva altuia de către un stat din afara organizației. Este posibil ca, în cazul unui posibil conflict între Turcia și Israel, să existe o anumită probabilitate ca Grecia să se alăture împotriva aliatului din NATO. Un asemenea eveniment poate avea loc dacă dialogul strategic dintre Tel Aviv, Atena și Nicosia ar duce la materializarea forței rapide de reacție.

Un alt moment important pentru evoluția relației dintre Ankara și Tel Aviv îl reprezintă afirmațiile premierului israelian Benjamin Netanyahu, făcute în urma vizitei lui Naren-

dra Modi. Acesta și-a declarat determinarea de a continua lupta împotriva Iranului, dar și împotriva unui nou oponent, numit „Axa Sunită”. Acest termen este folosit pentru prima oară, indicând restructurarea strategiei Israelului. Axa de Rezistență a Iranului nu mai reprezintă singura amenințare, fiind menționată emergența uneia noi, din care Turcia face parte.⁴⁶ Astfel, se poate constata cum ostilitatea față de Ankara este utilizată și în discursul public oficial.

Un ultim aspect care merită să fie amintit, cel mai recent, este sincronizarea retoricii folosite de liderii Turciei și Siriei. Într-un discurs, președintele Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a declarat că armatei turce i-ar fi ușor să pătrundă pe teritoriul Israelului. Șeful statului turc a comparat acest scenariu ipotetic cu intervențiile pe care Ankara le-a întreprins, de exemplu în Libia și Nagorno Karabakh (prin sprijinirea cu resurse militare a Azerbaidjanului).⁴⁷

Compararea Israelului cu un stat aflat în război civil și cu o regiune separatistă nu se potrivește realităților de pe teren, dar, cu toate acestea, transmite un mesaj de ostilitate. La rândul său, președintele Siriei s-a alăturat retoricii agresive la adresa Israelului. Ahmed al-Sharaa a declarat că Tel Avivul nu are dreptul de a menține controlul asupra Înălțimilor Golan. Acesta susținea că teritoriul respectiv este de drept al Siriei și a fost anexat ilegal, poporul sirian fiind îndrituit să îl recupereze.⁴⁸

Semnalăm faptul că ministrul de externe al Turciei, Hakan Fidan, a făcut o declarație cu caracter predictiv, prin care anticipa că Ankara va deveni următorul adversar al Tel Avivului. Unul dintre principalele argumente aduse este acela că Israelul nu poate să existe fără a avea un inamic statal.⁴⁹ Mesajele de acest tip dezvăluie stadiul în care au ajuns relațiile turco-israeliene, marcate de o ostilitate fățișă. Declarațiile devin din ce în ce mai agresive, însă un conflict deschis este foarte puțin probabil, cel puțin nu în timpul președinției lui Donald Trump în SUA.

Concluzii

În urma cercetării efectuate, se poate constata că relația turco-israeliană s-a degradat gradual, iar evenimentele care au declanșat

fenomenul au fost schimbul de replici de la Davos și atacul asupra navei Mavi Marmara. O potențială reapropiere a fost încercată prin mijlocirea administrației Obama. Totuși, efortul depus în această direcție s-a dovedit a fi conjunctural. Deși ambele state se opuneau regimului Assad după 2011, prăbușirea acestuia a generat mai multă tensiune și competiție între ele. Înlăturarea temporară a influenței iraniene, ca urmare a campaniilor militare ale SUA și Israelului contra Teheranului, a creat contextul în care interesele Turciei și Israelului au intrat în competiție directă.

Se poate observa că divergențele dintre Tel Aviv și Ankara au pornit de la schimbarea direcției în politica externă a Turciei. Administrația Erdoğan avea ambiția de a transforma Turcia într-un lider regional, prin extinderea relațiilor cu celelalte state din regiune, însă stabilirea acestor conexiuni cu statele arabe și islamice nu se potrivea cu viziunea geopolitică a Israelului. De asemenea, faptul că Ankara s-a alăturat efectiv protestelor internaționale prin care se sprijinea cauza palestiniană a constituit un alt obstacol în relația cu Tel Avivul. Astfel, disensiunile din relația turco-israeliană s-au accentuat, pe fondul diferențelor generate de viziunile strategice asupra Asiei de Vest.

Unul dintre rezultatele realinierii Ankarei a fost determinarea Israelului de a-și găsi noi parteneri de securitate în cadrul doctrinei sale de gestionare a securității în periferie. După cum s-a putut remarca, Turcia ajunge să fie un alt stat față de care Tel Avivul consideră că este necesar să ia măsuri de descurajare, iar astfel în doctrina de periferie este posibil să fie inclus un stat NATO. În cazul materializării unei forțe de reacție rapidă între Israel, Grecia și Cipru, direcționată împotriva Ankarei, alianța euroatlantică ar putea cunoaște un nivel considerabil de tensiune pe Flancul Sud-Estic. De asemenea, în strategia de periferie a Tel Avivului, la fel ca în perioada Războiului Rece, se regăsesc și kurzii, care primesc din partea acestuia un anumit sprijin material și politic pentru cauza lor. Modul în care relația dintre acest grup etnic și Tel Aviv a evoluat reprezintă încă un motiv pentru care relațiile turco-israeliene au ajuns în punctul în care se fac referiri la posibilitatea unui conflict militar.

Prima ipoteză a fost confirmată, dar necesită anumite adăugiri. Restructurarea geopolitică a Orientului Mijlociu a contat foarte mult, în special prin înlăturarea lui Saddam Hussein și prin declanșarea Primăverii Arabe. Primul eveniment a reprezentat o oportunitate prin care Turciei i s-a oferit vidul de putere necesar pentru a-și extinde influența în regiune. Însă, seismul politic din 2011 a afectat puterea geopolitică a Ankarei. Politica de tip „neo-otomanism” a reprezentat o schimbare în specificul politicii externe turce, care, ulterior, a intrat în contradicție tot mai mult cu interese israeliene.

A doua ipoteză a fost confirmată parțial. Relația bilaterală dintre Turcia și Israel s-a degradat gradual, momentele culminante fiind Forumul Economic de la Davos din 2009 și incidentul Mavi Marmara din 2010. Totuși, căderea regimului Assad a generat un nou context regional, în care riscul unei confruntări directe a crescut semnificativ. În acest sens, suprapunerea intereselor strategice pe teritoriul sirian indică tranziția către o etapă considerabil mai tensionată a relației bilaterale.

Ultima ipoteză a fost validată doar parțial, deoarece atât Turcia, cât și Israelul au dezvoltat relații tot mai apropiate cu actorii percepuți de cealaltă parte drept potențiale amenințări strategice. Totuși, în cazul Israelului, cooperarea cu actorii kurzi precedă perioada analizată, având rădăcini în contextul Războiului Rece. În schimb, apropierea Turciei de state și organizații considerate de Israel drept amenințări existențiale s-a intensificat în perioada guvernării AKP, pe fondul unei politici externe orientate spre consolidarea statutului de putere regională al Turciei. Incidentul de la Davos din 2009 reprezintă unul dintre momentele definitorii ale acestei reconfigurări, contribuind la apropierea strategică dintre Israel, Grecia și Cipru.

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ISTORIE MILITARĂ ȘI POLITICA DE SECURITATE A ROMÂNIEI

Dezorientarea strategică: exacerbarea nemulțumirilor sociale prin mijloace hibride în criza electorală din România (2024-2025)

Dr. Dorin Alin GAL

Abstract

The 2024 Romanian presidential election represents a turning point in European constitutional history: the first instance in which an EU and NATO Member State annulled a national vote due to proven hybrid interference by a foreign actor, namely the Russian Federation. This article argues that the primary objective of such interference is not merely the promotion of a specific candidate – in this case, the independent populist candidate Călin Georgescu – but rather the creation of “a sense of strategic disorientation” within the targeted society.

By combining long-standing domestic populist grievances with sophisticated “grey zone” tactics – including AI-driven amplification on TikTok and the illegal financing of electoral campaigns – foreign actors create a “zero-sum democratic trap”.

If state institutions intervene to protect electoral integrity, as demonstrated by the Constitutional Court’s annulment decision in December 2024, the intervention is immediately reframed by populist actors as a coup orchestrated by the “Deep State”. If institutions fail to act, democracy, as a matter of principle, fails. This dynamic generates a toxic narrative that erodes institutional trust regardless of the legal outcome.

Using Romania as its primary case study, this paper examines the transformation of overt pro-Russian propaganda into “sovereignist” disinformation, which weaponises existing socio-economic anxieties for manipulative purposes. The study concludes that countering this form of hybrid warfare requires moving beyond traditional fact-checking approaches towards a framework of strategic resilience capable of addressing the populist mechanisms through which foreign influence is disseminated.

Keywords: *Romania, hybrid warfare, populism, disinformation, electoral integrity, strategic disorientation*

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1. Introducere

Tema prezentei lucrări o reprezintă exploatarea uneia dintre cele mai inovatoare metode de exploatare a clivajelor populiste în societatea modernă: folosirea platformelor sociale și a clivajelor tradiționale preexistente în societate pentru crearea unui joc politic de sumă

nulă, în care actorii care se folosesc de acest instrument nu au cum să piardă în fața populației.

Importanța acestui demers este dată de vulnerabilitatea dovedită a societății românești la o astfel de abordare, mai ales în contextul anulării fără precedent a procesului electoral privind alegerea președintelui României din decembrie 2024.

Ipoteza centrală a acestui studiu se bazează pe o premisă evidentă, cu implicații serioase și persistente în arhitectura de securitate, în contextul amenințărilor și riscurilor moderne cu care se confruntă România: succesul interferenței externe în procesul electoral românesc din 2024-2025 nu s-a bazat doar pe eforturile de impunere a unor idei venite din exterior, ci și, în mare parte, pe acțiuni menite să amplifice și să reconfigureze anxietăți preexistente ale societății românești.

Putem considera acest fenomen drept o „dezorientare societală strategică”, o stare de paralizie cognitivă, cultivată cu grijă de actorii ostili care dispun de astfel de capacități. Asaltat de fluxuri informaționale contradictorii și care îi stimulează constant diverse emoții, alegătorul își pierde încrederea în reperele sale de validare a realității instituționale și societale în care trăiește. Lucrarea de față argumentează că, în cazul României, acest efect nu a fost un produs secundar al campaniei, ci obiectivul principal al acesteia.

La nivel național, acest sentiment pregnant de nemulțumire și dezorientare reprezintă una dintre faliile cele mai profunde și vulnerabilitățile cele mai accentuate ale României. În rădăcinată cu precădere în istoria orală, care caracterizează în general poporul român – în diversele sale forme de organizare – drept „o victimă” a circumstanțelor relațiilor internaționale, această narațiune a dus la împământenirea unei mentalități de „victimă” în societatea română modernă. În era războiului hibrid, cu consecințe încă nereglementate, este dovedit de fiecare dată că populațiile sunt capabile de o mobilizare în masă atunci când li se prezintă situații ale căror mize depășesc un anumit prag de impact emoțional¹.

Cu ajutorul tehnologiei moderne, aceste noi forme de amenințare sunt exploatare pentru a induce populației percepția că responsabilitatea bunăstării sale stă în „mâinile” statului și că „ghinionul” său are la origine efectele negative cauzate de procesul modern al economiei globalizate². În acest context, votul pentru un candidat populist precum Călin Georgescu nu a reprezentat preferința populației pentru respectivul politician, ci un act de revoltă societală împotriva sistemului, perceput ca fiind,

în cel mai bun caz, incompetent și, în cel mai rău caz, ilegal.

Această revoltă nu are o origine organică și nici nu a fost fabricată într-un vid, ci reprezintă o manifestare a sentimentului de neîncredere endemică în autoritate, prezent în societatea românească. Această neîncredere s-a cristalizat în timpul regimului comunist ca strategie de supraviețuire, statul fiind perceput în perioada pre-1989 ca o entitate opresivă, iar cetățenii refugiindu-se astfel în rețele informale și forme de memorie socială și orală. Perioada post-Revoluție a erodat în continuare relația cetățean-stat. Atunci când regulile formale ale unei societăți în tranziție nu sunt sincronizate cu normele informale de comportament ale populației, majoritatea cetățenilor vor alege deseori familiaritatea practicilor informale³.

Dificultățile de a remedia carențele sistemelor democratice moderne, combinate cu provocările sociale locale, care nu pot fi depășite decât prin educație, au creat sentimentul unei tranziții „traumatice”, percepută ca fiind perpetuă și inechitabilă. Promisiunea prosperității occidentale, echivalentul românesc al visului american, a rămas pentru mulți o noțiune abstractă, așteptarea acestora fiind, în continuare, că este responsabilitatea statului să le ofere această prosperitate.

La nivel politico-militar, actorii care dispun de capacități hibride au pornit de la constatarea, validă, de altfel, că o propagandă directă pro-rusă are șanse reduse de succes într-o societate în care memoria asociată comunismului și Moscovei încă lasă urme foarte adânci. În consecință, eforturile hibride s-au orientat către transformarea unor teme legitime de nemulțumire, precum creșterea accelerată a ratei inflației, erodarea puterii de cumpărare a cetățeanului și sentimentul (autoindus) de marginalizare în cadrul structurilor comunitare europene, într-un suveranism de camuflaj, fără vreun alt obiectiv decât promovarea unei narațiuni a crizei permanente.

Această „așteptare” constantă a devenit o stare de oboseală societală cronică, în contextul căreia votul pentru un candidat care părea să provină „din afara sistemului” s-a cristalizat drept o formă de justiție compensatorie, bazată pe nevoia oamenilor de a simți că au puterea de a alege⁴.

O altă ipoteză susținută de prezenta lucrare este că un electorat care nu votează un viitor coerent, ci alege să invalideze un prezent în care se simte irelevant, printr-o manifestare de suveranism emoțional, reprezintă un pericol și o vulnerabilitate strategică în fața unor actori cu eficiență dovedită în tacticile războiului hibrid.

2. Jocul de sumă nulă. Dilema populistă în cadrul alegerilor prezidențiale din 2024

Prin Hotărârea nr. 32 din 6 decembrie 2024, Curtea Constituțională a anulat procesul electoral privind alegerea președintelui României și a dispus ca procedura să fie reluată în integralitate⁵.

Pe termen mediu și lung, criza electorală a avut repercusiuni nu doar interne, ci și internaționale, declanșând nevoia de consolidare a relațiilor cu partenerii externi cei mai importanți și de restabilire a imaginii statului. Această criză a culminat chiar cu retrogradarea României, de către Economist Intelligence Unit, la statutul de „țară cu regim hibrid”⁶.

Această decizie fără precedent a conturat un joc de sumă nulă pentru arhitectura de securitate a României, factor cu deosebire relevant în ceea ce privește poziția statului român în relație cu partenerii externi. Pe de o parte, validarea unui scrutin considerat viciat prin metode de război hibrid ar fi evidențiat vulnerabilitatea instituțională a statului în fața actorilor ostili. Pe de altă parte, intervenția directă a Curții asupra votului popular, pentru prima oară în istoria României, a oferit materia primă necesară pentru narațiunea populistă a „statului captiv”. Deja existentă în mod tradițional, falia dintre societatea civilă și autorități s-a adâncit mai mult ca niciodată, ducând la o eroziune accentuată a încrederii publice.

Pilonul central al amenințării populiste din România rezidă în capacitatea narațiunii despre „statul captiv” de a strânge aderenți, transformând orice act legal într-o dovadă a conspirației. Într-un astfel de cadru, independența justiției sau acțiunile desfășurate de serviciile de informații pentru protejarea procesului electoral sunt reinterpretate drept mecanis-

me de autoprezervare ale unei aparente elite oculte, ce caută să reducă la tăcere „adevărata” voce a poporului. Amenințarea are potențialul de a evolua la nivel sistemic, deoarece această narațiune delegitimează ideea unui arbitru instituțional neutru și oferă cetățenilor doar imaginea mai multor facțiuni care se luptă pentru aceeași poziție de putere. Mai mult, contestarea prealabilă a arbitrajului interinstituțional oferă o singură soluție posibilă pe termen lung, chiar dacă aderenții săi pe termen scurt nu o conștientizează ca atare: o insurecție morală permanentă a cetățenilor care, sub pretextul redării puterii către cetățean, poate deschide calea către un regim autoritar modern.

Mai mult, criza a relevat o asimetrie periculoasă, existentă nu doar la nivelul statului român, ci și ca o vulnerabilitate a tuturor statelor democratice aflate în proces de adaptare la avansul tehnologic: viteza de reacție a mediului digital în raport cu lentoarea procedurilor democratice tradiționale⁷.

În cazul anulării procesului electoral din România, mecanismele de influență hibridă au operat cu agilitate și fluiditate, bazându-se pe țintirea anumitor segmente ale populației, prin intermediul unor finanțări cu surse greu de identificat⁸. Prin comparație, răspunsul instituțional al statului român a fost reactiv și lent. Populația, prinsă între suspiciunea de fraudă tehnologică și suspiciunea unei intervenții a puterii judecătorești, și-a pierdut și mai mult reperele de legătură cu realitatea politică.

Astfel, deși, pe plan extern, una dintre consecințe a fost retrogradarea României în cadrul indicilor internaționali privind existența democrației, se poate argumenta că noua realitate internă, unde dificultățile tradiționale ale relației cetățean-stat sunt augmentate printr-un eveniment contemporan de neîncredere structurală, este cea mai importantă consecință a crizei electorale prezidențiale de la finalul anului 2024.

De altfel, imaginea descrisă în această lucrare nu poate fi completă fără o examinare a anumitor caracteristici ale societății românești și a modului în care acestea influențează deschiderea populației către tendințele populiste și naționaliste. Spre deosebire de democrațiile consolidate ale Occidentului, reapariția ideilor populiste în comunitatea internațională

modernă a influențat țara noastră într-un mod extrem de diferit. Într-un context în care ideile tradiționale referitoare la superioritatea locală și istoria „glorioasă” a poporului ocupă deja un spațiu generos în mentalul colectiv, populația română a absorbit extrem de repede discursul clivajului social de tipul „noi împotriva lor”, atât de specific populismului.

Spre exemplu, pilonul tropismului dacic care alimentează populismul modern românesc este cartea lui Nicolae Densușianu, *Dacia preistorică*, publicată în 1913. Lucrarea propune teoria unei civilizații fundamentale dacice, ale cărei progrese ar fi impulsionat dezvoltarea civilizațiilor de pe întregul continent al Europei. Deși unii dintre cei mai reputați istorici români (Nicolae Iorga, A.D. Xenopol, Vasile Pârvan) au descris-o ca fiind un volum „metaforic”, nesuținut de dovezi empirice, aceasta a devenit lucrarea de căpătâi a tradiționaliștilor în căutare de repere. În *Getica: o protoistorie a Daciei*, Vasile Pârvan satiriza opera lui Densușianu: „romanul său fantastic «Dacia preistorică», plin de mitologie și filologie absurdă, care la apariția sa deșteaptă o admirație și un entuziasm nemărginit printre diletanții români în arheologie”⁹. Noțiunea unei superiorități istorice „reprimată” de potențiali dușmani ocuți precedă, așadar, amenințările hibride actuale cu care se confruntă statul român.

Instrumentalizarea hibridă a proceselor populiste este una dintre principalele amenințări la adresa democrațiilor moderne¹⁰, fiind necesar să fie înțeleasă în profunzime de participanții și factorii decizionali din sistemul național de apărare.

Un element central este faptul că actorii care utilizează aceste capacități hibride nu creează ideologii noi, ci se folosesc de mijloacele tehnologice pentru accelerarea neorganică a tensiunilor sociale existente¹¹, prin algoritmi și microtargetarea populației. Aceste procese transformă dezbaterile politice, inerente oricărei democrații, în conflicte în aparență existențiale, percepute ca o amenințare directă asupra fundamentelor statului și ordinii democratice.

Accesul tot mai răspândit la platforme sociale și apariția continuă a acestora au dus la dificultăți de reglementare pentru administrațiile politice tradiționale, din cauza lentorii procedurilor instituționale. Concomitent, a apărut fenomenul așa-numitelor zone gri ale

internetului, platforme cunoscute pentru conținut incitator și discursuri violente împotriva ordinii publice, dar insuficient reglementate pentru a putea fi monitorizate eficient.

În spații digitale precum unele grupuri de pe platforma Telegram sau anumite bule informaționale favorizate de algoritmi TikTok, victoria unui adversar nu mai este un rezultat democratic legitim, ci este, iremediabil, o repercusiune viciată a unui proces ilegal care amenință direct supraviețuirea identitară a grupului respectiv.

Un alt element central acestei amenințări este cel denumit în psihologia militară „sabotaj epistemic”. În termeni simpli, prin sabotaj epistemic se distruge fundamentul comun de fapte recunoscute de un grup ca fiind adevărate¹², condiție absolut necesară pentru o democrație funcțională. Prin crearea de ecosisteme informaționale paralele, unde teorii ale conspirației sunt validate de experți anonimi, aflați pe statul de plată al actorilor ostili, sau de inteligența artificială, societății civile îi este imposibil să se pună de acord asupra veridicității unui fapt, precum integritatea procesului electoral prezidențial.

Când se întâmplă acest lucru, jocul de sumă nulă devine inevitabil, cetățeanul fiind obligat să aleagă o tabără pe baza unor criterii pur emoționale, ceea ce elimină orice posibilitate de consens rațional și de mediere a relației populație-stat. Pericolul este cu atât mai mare cu cât avem de-a face cu o amenințare continuă, care nu ține seama de caracteristicile de moment ale situației. În concordanță cu spiritul populist, este irelevant dacă aceste ecosisteme informaționale paralele caută slăbirea valorilor occidentale de la început de secol 20 sau a multilateralismului global aflat sub amenințare în epoca modernă¹³. Procedura standard de operare rămâne aceeași, doar impactul său fiind augmentat de tehnologia modernă.

3. Reziliența în fața populismului hibrid. Depășirea modelului tradițional de fact-checking

Contextul alegerilor prezidențiale din România în 2024-2025 a demonstrat limitele structurale și temporale ale metodelor

tradiționale prin care autoritățile publice caută să combată dezinformarea și populismul hibrid.

Procedura tradițională de verificare a faptelor (*fact-checking*) a fost concepută pentru o eră în care adevărul transmis de autorități era suficient pentru a regla clivajele provocate de informația falsă transmisă de actori ostili. În contextul modern însă, și tratând criza electorală prezidențială din România ca studiu de caz doveditor, modelul nu doar că și-a demonstrat limitele, ci este relevat și ca o potențială amenințare pentru securitatea statului.

Fact-checking a oferit un răspuns la informațiile false, însă a ignorat vectorii declanșatori ai acestora (algoritmii și crearea de ecosisteme informaționale paralele) și motivul pentru care există de fapt o amenințare: încărcătura emoțională a populației, accentuată de tensiunile sociale preexistente.

Într-un mediu marcat de sabotajul epistemic hibrid, demascarea tradițională a minciunilor devine o amenințare. Publicul vizat nu va mai percepe demascarea ca pe un act de informare din partea autorităților, ci ca pe o formă de agresiune a „Sistemului” asupra aspirațiilor populației.

Atunci când un alegător este expus constant la un flux inepuizabil de conținut care îi validează credințele și frustrările istorice și sociale preexistente (neîncrederea în autoritate, în cazul României), *fact-checking* alimentează paradoxul, nu îl înlătură¹⁴. Cu cât o instituție va încerca mai insistent să corecteze factual o informație, cu atât va fi acuzată mai mult de ascunderea realității, confirmând narațiunea suveranistă a „statului captiv”.

Prin urmare, reziliența la aceste amenințări nu mai poate fi doar o chestiune de „adevăr versus minciună”, ci necesită o alfabetizare informațională a populației, o „imunizare mentală”, pentru a crește gradul de recunoaștere a acestor informații în rândul publicului și a tipurilor de conținut create special pentru a-i alimenta prejudecățile sociale.

În același timp, vulnerabilitatea ce amplifică această amenințare este chiar relația deficitară dintre stat și cetățenii săi. Prin măsuri de reconstrucție a contractului social, de restabilire a încrederii între autorități și populație, poate fi redus vidul exploatat în prezent de actorii ce utilizează instrumente hibride pentru propriile interese. Există o corelație strânsă

între percepția unui conflict ipotetic constant între stat și cetățeni și deschiderea acestora către a folosi internetul pentru ceea ce ei simt că este participare politică¹⁵.

Concluzii

Succesul interferenței externe în alegerile prezidențiale din România din 2024-2025 a demonstrat că democrațiile moderne nu mai pot considera simpla existență a legilor drept o protecție suficientă.

Adaptarea securității statului la complexitatea contextului social modern impune dezvoltarea unei reziliențe active. Dacă reemergența populismului și dezvoltarea amenințărilor hibride în anii 2000 au dus la implementarea noțiunii de verificare a informațiilor (*fact-checking*), reziliența strategică trebuie să fie sistemul de operare al democrațiilor în epoca „post-adevăr”.

Din perspectiva lecțiilor învățate, agențiile de securitate ale statului trebuie să colaboreze cu platformele și actorii digitali pentru identificarea formelor de comportament neautentic înainte ca acestea să se răspândească și să exploateze vulnerabilitățile existente. În plus, comunicarea strategică transparentă rămâne esențială, dar capătă un rol diferit. Deciziile majore, precum anularea procesului electoral în cazul României, trebuie însoțite de campanii explicative puternice, menite să traducă limbajul juridic într-un limbaj cotidian, pe înțelesul cetățeanului, care nu mai acceptă automat informațiile transmise de stat ca fiind credibile. Concomitent, un puternic parteneriat public-privat, pentru promovarea unor instrumente de verificare ușor accesibile, poate fi un instrument eficient.

Criza electorală din 2024-2025 din România nu poate fi catalogată doar o eroare de sistem sau o breșă de securitate. A reprezentat un moment de expunere concretă a realității geopolitice în care ne aflăm, a noilor tipuri de amenințări cu care se confruntă România și a nevoii de actualizare a sistemelor de prevenție timpurie pentru a include și amenințările hibride. În noul statu-quo, autonomia completă a statului nu mai poate fi considerată o stare de fapt, ci un efort continuu de voință.

Note

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Survival Strategies of Small States among Great Powers. The Case of Romania

George-Vadim TIUGEA

Abstract

Within the academic debate concerning international relations, the general emphasis of studies has been placed upon great powers and the relations among them. However, after the Second World War, small states were increasingly taken into account as significant actors in international politics, mainly due to the growing role of international organisations. Thus, researchers noticed that, despite asymmetric capabilities between great powers and small states (in terms of population, territory, military and economic strength), with regard to influence at international level, small states are a category that is worth analysing. Their comparative advantage can be mainly found in the capability to establish and develop relations between themselves and with the great powers. The main research question of this article is whether a small state can survive among the competing interests of the great powers in its region. The case study used by the article concerns Romania, which can be considered a small state in Eastern Europe, both in terms of surface and population. The article attempts to acknowledge the role of the historical evolution of the Romanian state in creating a particular strategic culture, which underlines the main orientation of Romanian foreign policy even today.

Keywords: small states, great powers, international relations, Romania, strategic culture, foreign policy

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In most studies in the field of security, small states are usually considered less important actors in today's world. However, they manage to survive in this complex setting by using various strategies. The main working hypothesis of this article is that small states usually find survival strategies that align with their own strategic culture.

1. Methodology

In conducting this research, I use selective historical data, which are interpreted according to neorealist and social constructivist theories

of international relations presented in the first part. The reason I use this moderated quantitative type of research is the assumption that by quantifying historical cases, I will be able to reach relevant conclusions regarding the prevalence of a certain behaviour by a small state (in this case, Romania) at an international level. The historical data has been carefully chosen in order not to replicate traditional protochronist approaches that were commonplace during the communist era. However, a certain ethnocentric approach, inherited from the interwar period, was used in the analysis, as it was deemed relevant for explaining the international positioning of the Romanian state.

For a more consistent analysis, I have chosen to consider states as the main actors in international affairs, in accordance with neorealist theories, without, however, overlooking the fact that within states there are various groups with their own agendas and interests, which sometimes even extend to the international realm. At the same time, I have included a geopolitical approach to international relations, in which states are compared in terms of material capabilities (population, territory, resources), as well as a structuralist perspective, to better assess the role of international organisations on state behaviour, particularly after the First World War. By choosing this combination, I aim to offer a new perspective on the behaviour of small states, emphasising the elements of identity and socialisation in international relations.

The article is structured into four main parts. The first part deals with defining small states, according to the international relations theories. The second part concerns the analysis of the historical legacy of the modern Romanian state, which strongly influenced the strategic culture of contemporary Romania. The third part aims to evaluate the evolution of Romania as a small state, from its official establishment to the present day. The final part provides some conclusions regarding the relevance of the Romanian case for the strategic culture of small states.

2. Defining Small States and the International Context

According to the Montevideo Convention of 1933, in order to be considered a sovereign state, an entity must have a permanent population, a well-defined territory, a functioning government and be recognised as such by other countries¹. However, in many cases, the recognition of a country as independent does not convey much about its status at an international level. International relations scientists initially favoured a vision in which the attitudes of the most important countries, usually called “great powers”, were the only relevant ones, while the attitudes of smaller or “weaker” countries were considered to be insignificant. Gradually, new theories were developed, espe-

cially after the end of the Second World War, which increasingly took into account the potential of such states at an international level. The main features in this endeavour concerned an analysis of such states’ capabilities, institutions and relations².

The realist paradigm constitutes one of the first attempts by the international scientific community (especially in the United States) to define international relations within a well-defined theoretical framework. Emerging as a reaction to interwar idealism, which was so violently countered by the Second World War, realist writers tried to avoid the mistakes that were considered to be the main causes of interwar foreign policy, by promoting a school of thought based on scepticism and a coherent normative conceptualisation, with precise elements to guide decision-makers in crisis situations – a subtle renewal of the 19th-century European Concert system.

Some basic features of realist thought should be emphasised from the beginning, noting that there is no common theory shared by all realist writers, but only some resemblances. A first element is the primacy of states as the main international actors. As a consequence, the emphasis is on relations between states and less on relations between other kinds of non-governmental actors. The state is seen as an actor that acts in a unitary manner, its interests being presented with a single voice, neglecting internal dissent. At the same time, the state is a rational actor in the sense that its fundamental interest is to ensure its survival and the achievement of its national objectives³. As a result, another important component of realism is a special interest in war and national security. This issue is seen as a zero-sum game, in which some states win influence and maximise national security at the expense of others.

Another element of the realist vision of international relations is the structure of the international system, which is seen as an anarchy in which each state acts independently of others, without any authority regulating relations among them. Within this system, power relations are of vital importance, leading to the polarisation of states around the main actors and creating a balance of power between those actors. In spite of this, the main preoccupation of

all states is, first of all, their own security and, only at a secondary level, preserving the balance. When the configuration of power relations changes, a disturbance of the old system takes place, manifested through a cycle that can take the form of war and which results in a new power configuration within the system⁴.

Moreover, according to neorealist thought (for example, Kenneth Waltz), the system can restrain actors at some point to level the balance. Waltz's vision is based on an analogy between the international system and the market economy⁵. Thus, states are seen as economic agents and the free market is the international system, which functions independently of state action. Nevertheless, the international system, when compared to a free market, no longer shares the features of a state of anarchy in which nobody can influence the process. The market itself functions according to certain previously established principles; therefore, Waltz's international system possesses rather hierarchic features, contradicting a basic realist principle. In fact, this situation is also noted by other authors, such as Hedley Bull, who considers that there is a sort of world order based on the concept of international law – as coined by Grotius – but which exists simultaneously with the competition for power⁶.

Other realist authors, such as Ernst B. Haas, deny the importance of a balance of power system under the new conditions of the nuclear age⁷. In Haas's vision, nuclear deterrence functions as a substitute for the balance of power, creating a situation similar to the "coward's game", in which each of the actors involved seeks to avoid conflict escalation to prevent mutual losses, ultimately reaching a status quo, as the best alternative for both sides (speaking of a bipolar system, as during the Cold War). A specific theory is offensive realism, developed by authors like John J. Mearsheimer. According to this, states do not pursue the balance of power, but only their own interest in maximising their power – a fact proven by the historical record of the last two centuries⁸.

A central concept developed by realist thinkers in order to evaluate states was power, understood as capabilities. According to Raymond Aron, power can be defined in three different manners: first, power amounts to ca-

capacity of coercion; second, it takes the form of concrete resource; and finally, it refers to resources that are effectively mobilised⁹.

In terms of coercion capacity, power is defined according to existing relations between international actors. This kind of power cannot be evaluated except in relationship with others, to the extent to which those others regard it as a resource (for example, nuclear power) which can put a certain pressure on actors that do not possess it. Thus, the fact that an actor possesses a certain coercive force gives it a comparative advantage over others. As the interest of others (usually small states) is survival at an international level, they might choose to level with this force (*balancing*), pass this responsibility to other significant actors (*buck-passing*), or they could even try to make an alliance with this force in the hope that they would thus be spared (*bandwagoning*)¹⁰.

Taken in the sense of effectively mobilised resources, power can be defined as a material ability in various fields, such as population, territory, natural resources, economic prosperity, or military capabilities. Usually, when analysing national security, military force is overemphasised compared to the other fields, as this sector (the armed forces) is involved in effectively preserving security. Nevertheless, other sectors have lately become increasingly important, so that national security can no longer be conceived only in military terms.

In the case of small states, the asymmetry of power resources when compared to great powers seems to be the main vulnerability in ensuring their national security. A small state is, by definition, an actor of reduced size in terms of population, territory, and sometimes natural resources, but not always in terms of economic development (the examples of countries such as Luxembourg, Iceland or Singapore easily come to mind).

As international relations were, at least until 1945, conceived as a competition of military power, the fate of small states seemed to be inescapable, leaving them at the mercy of great powers. However, from the early stages of states' existence, smaller entities developed various strategies (such as the three above-mentioned) in order to ensure their survival or, at least, the continuation of their basic

functioning under various altered forms. Some used their natural conditions in order to secure actual or virtual independence from outside powers.

Another kind of strategy adopted by small states concerned the formation of alliances to counterbalance the great powers. One of the first historical cases of this alternative was the Delian League, which reunited small Greek city-states supporting free maritime trade (most notably Athens) and opposing growing military continental powers, such as the Persian Empire or Sparta. Although these power disputes were eventually won by Sparta (and its allies) in 404 BC, the persistence of the Delian League for more than seven decades showed that such an enterprise was worthwhile for smaller states standing no chance of survival on their own¹¹.

In the broader region of Eastern Europe, the most frequent solution for small states was to submit to the great powers in order to avoid complete obliteration. Due to the easier passage through this area (made up mainly of plains or small hills and mountains), most military powers (from the Great Migrations to the Mongols or the Ottomans) managed to subdue the locally organised entities and impose their own rule over the latter.

The evolution of international relations after 1945 led to the emergence of theories emphasising the peaceful development of nations, regulated by well-defined international agreements¹². The seeds of this kind of thought were sown by US President Woodrow Wilson through his famous Fourteen Points. The main idea was that world nations could agree to adopt some rules that would form the framework for an international organisation more cohesive than traditional alliances. This organisation, named the League of Nations, was to include all independent nations and lay the foundations of "collective security"¹³.

Traditionally, international relations were about the pursuit of advantages in relation to an enemy and seeking greater security, predominantly according to the military art. With the emergence of collective security, this strategy had to take into account the action of the entire bloc of nations (the internation-

al institution) against a potential aggressor. Nevertheless, one should note that, had the Wilsonian model been thoroughly followed, there would have been no enemy, as all nations would have been members of the same structure and would have followed the same rules. For this reason, the Wilsonian model can be considered utopian, as its purposes are maximalist.

In practice, the League of Nations failed to include all nations, and its authority did not substitute the national authority of any member state. This outcome was driven by the intentions of revisionist states to overthrow the system and by the hesitations of important members to punish aggressor states when the situation imposed such a measure. Additionally, the United States failed to join the organisation, which decreased the latter's prestige in the world. Ultimately, this unfortunate experience led to a return towards more pragmatic solutions and to the temporary failure of collective security.

In spite of this, several law experts raised again the issue of a global international organisation after the end of the war in 1945. In practice, the United Nations (UN) system was based on a simulation of international debate by means of the General Assembly, but the executive force of the system was limited to the five permanent members of the Security Council (the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China). In this context, one cannot speak of an organisation in which all countries have the same rights and can promote their interests equally well, regardless of their size. It is rather a model of an elitist club¹⁴, in which some are "more equal than others".

More precisely, the UN system failed to function during the Cold War, when there were major differences between Western allies and the Soviet Union. During the 1950s, the Korean crisis determined a simulation of UN intervention which, in fact, masked the US containment policy towards the expansion of communism in North-East Asia. Although it had veto power within the Security Council (UNSC), the Soviet Union was boycotting the organisation at that time, while China's place

was held by Taiwan. Thus, international consensus was the result of the special circumstances of the moment.

During the 1960s, while relations between the two superpowers were characterised by the so-called “*détente*”, the practice of abstention by some UNSC members emerged in issues where there was formal but not substantial agreement. The club model persisted, but an alternative reaction was produced by decolonisation, which brought new members of the UN – most of them small states – without a democratisation of the system. In this context, the system’s legitimacy was questioned by the coalition of the so-called “Third World” around the Non-Aligned Movement, led by countries marginalised within their own subsystems, such as the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Yugoslavia, Egypt and India.

During the 1970s, a new approach emerged, following the admission of the PRC to the UNSC, supported by the US¹⁵, and the attempts to democratise the system. This did not eventually happen due to the persistence of power clashes in some remote parts of the world, but an alternative to the UN emerged at the European level through the creation of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The evolution of the European security model was, in fact, the only one to bring to the surface collective security and interdependence as a model of international relations, starting from the example of European economic integration within the European Economic Community (EEC). In this context, the role of small states began to increase, as they could form alliances within organisations in order to fulfil their interests. Thus, the institutionalisation of international relations brought to the fore the role of this new category of states¹⁶.

At the same time, though, the evolution of structures such as the European Union during the 1990s raised the question of sovereignty limitations for member states. While, in theory, these limitations concerned all members, in practice the influence of larger members (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy) determined a marginalisation of small states, which had to adopt one of the three

abovementioned attitudes from the realist perspective. The main difference, however, is that diplomatic solutions prevailed over the military ones.

The use of other sciences for analysing international relations during recent decades led to the emergence of a variety of theories which attempt to change the perspective on various situations. One of these theories is social constructivism, in which the state is no longer the main actor of international relations, but only one of many actors with significant interests (stakeholders), together with international organisations, large corporations, non-governmental organisations, mass media trusts, interest groups, political parties, ethnic or religious communities, civic associations etc. At the same time, international actors are no longer characterised solely by rational attitudes, but by exhibiting a socio-cultural or psychological identity, promoting their own values and norms, and using dialogue and socialisation¹⁷. Another important component is the perception of each actor, which is determined by certain factors, such as previous experiences, cultural stereotypes, or available information (including hidden parts of vital information).

According to Alexander Wendt, state interactions at international level are determined not only by the power ratio between them, but also by their internal social structures, which contribute to the formation of the national interest at any given point (which can change in a different setting). Only after analysing this synthesis can each actor acquire different identities, ranging from rival to ally. At the same time, the international system does not decisively determine the behaviour of actors, nor do the latter decide a course of events over another by their own means; there is a mutual influence between the two components, which contributes to the configuration of international relations¹⁸.

According to Peter Katzenstein, culture, religion and identity are non-material elements that can explain the formation of states’ national interests and foreign policy. Norms also play a decisive role in modelling the identity of international actors, together with the environment in which the actor exists. The process of historical change also has an important

influence on a state's identity, alongside the evolution of the nation-state. Thus, during the elaboration of foreign policy, cultural elements become more important than rational elements, power quantification, and political survival. At the same time, in the context of globalisation, regions are becoming increasingly more important than states, rendering current national borders irrelevant¹⁹.

In Jeffrey Checkel's view, international organisations have the role of achieving a "social learning" process in which involved actors are convinced to adopt a behaviour based upon conduct norms which must be abided by. Thus, international relations are the result of active interaction between relevant actors (states, organisations, and citizens/personalities), by which decisions are taken, following rational choices based on the degree of socialisation ensured by those entities. An important role is played by pressure (lobby) groups, which try to impose the adoption of favourable decisions by international actors (states, organisations) following dialogue and the negotiation of mutual interests. Those groups can also be transnational and have idealistic interests, as in the case of humanitarian or environmentalist groups. Following this process, international actors react in a predictable manner, seeking to conform to certain norms that validate them as members of a select international group, thus enabling them to better promote their own interests²⁰.

Other authors emphasise the issue of trust between international actors, which lies at the basis of current international relations. Trust is generated not only by adherence of various actors to general norms, but also by the psychological inclinations of leaders towards co-operation or conflict; furthermore, it is shaped by the historical evolution of bilateral relations, general perceptions, and collective memory. In the end, social constructivism emphasises the role of relations between international entities as being decisive for the evolution of the situation at a world level. In this context, small states can have an increased role by promoting their shared norms through membership of international structures, which they dominate in terms of numbers²¹.

3. Strategic Culture of the Romanian State – Historical Inheritance

Before assessing the survival strategies of the Romanian state since its official establishment in mid-19th century, some mention must be made concerning the strategic culture which forms the basis of the major attitudes exhibited by Bucharest in its relations with the outer world. Strategic culture is defined in specialised literature on this matter as "the socially transmitted, identity derived norms, ideas and patterns of behaviour that are shared among the most influential actors and social groups within a given political community, which help to shape a ranked set of options for a community's pursuit of security and defence goals"²². Strategic culture does not directly determine the practical behaviour of a state by itself, but it has an important influence on the general attitude towards relations with other countries and the preferred foreign policy tools. It is shaped by the collective memory preserved by political elites of certain historical events marking the evolution of state entities.

Strategic culture includes some essential concepts, such as identity, norms and culture. Identity concerns the manner in which a nation-state conceives its role in its region and its relations with other countries (for example, kin nations). Norms regard the security policies preferred by the state in order to overcome various problematic situations. Culture represents "the environment in which norms and identity are shaped"²³. At the same time, strategic culture can be conceived as being made up of a few layers, using an analogy to the Earth's layers. Thus, the core is made up of the nation-state's constellation, which is identity-derived; the mantle is made up of the security conception and role conception, which are norm-derived; and the crust is made up of foreign policy orientation and the use of force in international relations. Of these layers, the core is the part of strategic culture which rarely changes; the mantle can change at some point, while the crust can change more often, following certain decisive events²⁴.

In what concerns the Romanian nation-state, an important role in its strategic culture is played by a specific identity formed under the influence of elite studies during the

late 18th and early 19th centuries within the three principalities situated on the western and eastern slopes of the Southern Carpathians, north of the Danube. Thus, one of the founding myths of Romanian identity is the ancestry from the remaining Indo-European population of the ancient Kingdom of Dacia and the Roman colonists who arrived after the conquest of this territory in 106 AD. This led to an inclination towards friendly relations with Romance (Latin origin) countries, such as France, Italy, Spain, or Portugal. At the same time, taking into account the position of Romanian-inhabited lands, having as neighbours mainly Slavic peoples (Southern and Eastern), the nation-state has been seen as “a Latin island in a Slavic sea” (the Hungarian neighbour has been purposely omitted, due to the long-standing direct rivalry in Transylvania). Therefore, one of the most important components of Romanian identity is continuity²⁵, which establishes a direct link between the people and the inhabited territory. However, coupled with the feeling of insularity in relation to its direct neighbours, this has led to isolationism and a preference for alliances with international actors from distant regions.

At the same time, the Romanian nation is conceived in rather Germanic terms – emphasising ethnic features and a common language – rather than in French terms, which emphasise a civic nation encompassing various ethnic groups. This is a direct result of the fact that, contrary to much of Western Europe, the Romanian nation was formed before the Romanian state; the latter was thus conceived as the major strategic objective for the elites within the three Danube-Carpathian principalities²⁶. The religious component of Romanian ethnic identity is less important, as it is either shared with the Slavic neighbours (particularly regarding Wallachia and Moldavia, which are Eastern Orthodox Christian) or was imposed by the Hungarian neighbour (in Transylvania, in the form of Roman or Greek Catholicism). This particular combination within Romanian identity led to the emergence of the two competing orientations: westernism (imitating Western Europe, encouraging modernisation and urbanisation, and seeking alliances with countries from that region) and autochthonism (emphasising originality of Romanians, idealising the rural patriarchal society,

and rejecting external influences). This would influence the entire evolution of the Romanian state until the present day²⁷.

Thus, an important part in the formation of Romanian strategic culture has been the historical experience of the three medieval principalities on the territory of the current Romanian state. Modern Romania, as direct successor of the three principalities, has inherited their perception of international relations in this area; that is why we consider it highly relevant for the development of Romanian strategic culture. Even if the communist protochronist historiography emphasised the instances in which each of the three principalities achieved military success (even if only temporary or partial) against some of the stronger neighbours (the Ottoman Empire, the Hungarian Kingdom, Habsburg Austria, and the Polish Kingdom), the survival of these entities was, in fact, ensured most of all through diplomatic means and the strategy of bandwagoning²⁸. This is shown in Table 1 (below), where some significant events from the history of each of the three principalities were selected (according to their influence over the further evolution of each principality) and assessed from the perspective of ensuring the survival of the entity or its defeat, according to three alternative responses: balancing (alliances with other small entities), buck-passing (non-involvement, neutrality) or bandwagoning (alliance with a great power). The numeric result favours bandwagoning and a mixed record in the case of buck-passing strategy, as opposed to the less favourable balancing option within the strategic culture of the three embryos that would later become the Romanian nation-state.

4. Romania's Evolution as A Small State – from the Establishment to the Present Day

The creation of the Romanian state was the first moment taken into account for the assessment of the strategy adopted by the Romanian governing elites. Caught between three empires (the Ottoman, Russian and Austrian), the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia decided to form a single state by electing the

same person, Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, as ruler. This step was supported by the French Empire in its quest to avoid Russian control over the Mouths of the Danube following the latter's defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856). The unification of 24 January 1859 was also supported by Romanian revolutionaries of 1848, most of whom were Freemasons and lobbyists around the French Emperor, Napoleon III. During the following seven years, a new state was born, baptised "Romania" (123,335 square kilometres and 4 million inhabitants), by virtue of its linguistic affinities with the former Roman Empire, but developing as a rather unitary national state, secular since 1864, with its own army, a sort of constitution (1865), and

Table 1 – *Results of the Danube-Carpathian Principalities' strategies*

Principality:	Balancing:	Buck-passing:	Bandwagoning:	Result:
<i>Transylvania</i>	1600, Union with Walachia and Moldavia	1526, Hungary's defeat at Mohács		Survival
				Defeat
			1691, Vassal of the Habsburg Empire	Survival
		1848, Revolutionary war in Transylvania		Defeat
<i>Moldavia</i>	1600, Union with Walachia and Transylvania 1711, Alliance with Russia against the Ottoman Empire	-	1410, Alliance with the Polish Kingdom	Survival
			1504, Polish-Ottoman condominium	Survival
				Defeat
				Defeat
			1831, Russian-Ottoman condominium	Survival
			1859, Alliance with the French Empire	Survival (union with Walachia)

Principality:	Balancing:	Buck-passing:	Bandwagoning:	Result:
<i>Walachia</i>	1396, Crusade against the Ottoman Empire 1456, Crusade against the Ottoman Empire 1600, Union with Transylvania and Moldavia 1716, Crusade against the Ottoman Empire		1417, Vassal of the Ottoman Empire 1831, Russian-Ottoman condominium 1859, Alliance with the French Empire	Defeat Survival Defeat Defeat Defeat Survival Survival (union with Moldavia)
Total:	7 defeats (0%)	1 survival (50%) 1 defeat (50%)	8 survivals (100%)	9 survivals (53%) 8 defeats (47%)

national political strategies²⁹. Thus, local elites managed to accomplish their interests by gathering the support of some distant great powers (Britain, France, and the German and Italian states) against the passive opposition of the neighbouring ones (Austria, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire). This was a skilful use of the European Concert of Powers and an acknowledgement of the functioning international society of the mid-19th century, especially the balance of power on the European continent.

The following step in the Romanian state's strategy was to become independent from its formal suzerain power, the Ottoman Empire, and to secure the recognition of this independence from the European great powers,

thus completing the attributes of a state (besides territory, population and a functioning government). This was achieved by participating as an ally of the Russian Empire in its war against the Ottoman Empire from 1877 to 1878. The objective was achieved, even if the Russian Empire ultimately returned to the Mouths of the Danube by annexing Southern Bessarabia in exchange for attributing most of the province of Dobruja to Romania³⁰. This was a classic case of bandwagoning, even if only for a short time, in order to achieve the strategic goal. The recognition of Romania's independence by the European great powers completed this process by 1881, when Romania became a kingdom.

The next step in the strategy of the Romanian elites was the establishment of an alliance with the leading European great power of that time, the German Empire, in order to guarantee the country's territorial integrity. This was achieved in 1883, when Romania signed a secret alliance treaty with the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy)³¹. This was another case of bandwagoning in order to ensure the state's survival between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Romania assumed the role of referee in the Balkans by virtue of its position and potential strength. This was reflected during the Second Balkan War (1913), when it decided to attack Bulgaria, which had expanded too much into Macedonia according to its former allies, Serbia and Greece. This led to Bulgaria's defeat and to a more equitable division of Macedonia among the three former allies³². Also, Romania acquired Southern Dobruja, an ethnically mixed territory with a significant Turkish population, reaching a surface area of 137,903 square kilometres and a population of 8 million inhabitants. This time, the Romanian state chose the strategy of aligning with other small countries in the region (Serbia and Greece) in order to preserve the regional balance of power, which had been affected by the power vacuum left by the retreat of the decaying Ottoman Empire.

The following step in the strategy of the Romanian state was expansion in order to include the ethnic Romanians near its borders. The First World War, which began in the summer of 1914, offered a unique opportunity to this end. Although a formal ally of the Triple Alliance, Romania chose to remain neutral and follow the evolution of events. Eventually, after weighing the offers of the two fighting alliances, Bucharest chose to join the Entente (France, Russia and the United Kingdom), after being promised the economically richer territories of Transylvania and Bukovina, which belonged at that moment to Austria-Hungary, while giving up the poorer territory of Bessarabia, which belonged to the Russian Empire³³. It was a rational choice moment, although not all political forces supported this major step (the Conservatives favoured the Triple Alliance, while the Liberals supported the Entente). At the same

time, it was also a bandwagoning strategy, as the Romanian military was rather unprepared for such a war and Bucharest relied on the support of Russian troops and French weapons and military experts. Eventually, Romania managed to expand by capturing both Bessarabia (in the context of the Russian Civil War) and Transylvania³⁴. What was called "Greater Romania" (295,049 square kilometres and 16 million inhabitants) became a reality after the Paris Peace Treaties (1919-1920), agreed to by the major powers of France, the United Kingdom, and Italy, but not by the newly founded Soviet Russia, which contested Romania's eastern border. The favourable outcome was again the result of a bandwagoning strategy.

In the interwar period, Romania's strategy was dedicated to preserving the status quo in its region and countering the interests of revisionist neighbouring countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria (defeated in the First World War), and the Soviet Union. This attitude dwelt upon the isolationist element of the Romanian strategic culture. At the same time, Romania supported and was an active member of the League of Nations, the first international organisation gathering both small states and great powers³⁵. The Romanian state, taking up the concept of "*cordon sanitaire*" developed by French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau in 1919 (to designate a possible defensive alliance of countries stretching from Finland to the Balkans, intended to prevent an alliance between Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia) and responding to a proposal from Czechoslovakia, agreed to form the Little Entente. This was a defensive alliance including three countries neighbouring Hungary (Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia). It was one of the first instances in history when three small countries joined forces in order to consolidate their national security and prevent opposing military actions by the Great Powers. The new alliance benefited from the diplomatic support of France³⁶. However, the inclusion of Poland in the organisation failed due to the latter's border disagreements with Czechoslovakia. In the end, the Little Entente failed to fulfil its role following the quick rise of Nazi Germany during the 1930s and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938³⁷.

Another regional initiative supported by Romania was the Balkan Pact, which also included Greece, Türkiye, and Yugoslavia. The aim of this initiative was to prevent territorial claims by Bulgaria against its neighbouring countries and to defend their national security against external threats. Initially conceived as an inclusive collective agreement based on the principles of the League of Nations, the organisation failed to attract all the Balkan countries (Bulgaria and Albania refused to join) and had only the support of France among the Great Powers (although Italy also participated in its initial discussions). Much like the Little Entente, the Balkan Pact ultimately failed to fulfil its objectives in the context of the rise of Nazi Germany in Europe³⁸. In 1938, its members agreed to the rearmament of Bulgaria, in direct violation to the Paris Peace Treaties of 1919-1920. In 1940, following ultimatums from the Soviet Union, from Hungary (supported by Germany and Italy), and from Bulgaria (supported by the same two great powers), Romania had to cede the territories of Northern Transylvania, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, Hertsa region and Southern Dobruja (being thus reduced to 195,259 square kilometres and 14 million inhabitants). The regional initiatives failed³⁹, thus leaving a sour memory for future Romanian leaders and causing a general distrust within Romanian strategic culture towards alliances with other small states.

In the context of the Second World War, Romania became a faithful German ally and joined the Axis forces in the war against the Soviet Union in June 1941, in another typical bandwagoning move. The official justification for this action was regaining Bessarabia from the Soviet Union. In fact, Romania continued its participation in the war against the Soviet Union (also after recapturing Bessarabia, on the latter's territory up to Stalingrad and back) until August 1944, when the country's military leader was removed by a coup led by King Michael, and Romania switched sides, joining the Allies against the Axis powers. At that point, it had become clear that the Allies were going to win the war, so Romania again chose a bandwagoning strategy in order to recuperate at least Northern Transylvania from Hungary. This eventually happened after the 1947 Paris

Treaty, with the support of the Soviet Union (Romania's territory was 238,397 square kilometres – remaining so until the present day, and its population was 16 million inhabitants). In exchange, Romania had to join the Soviet camp as a satellite country (with Soviet troops stationed on its territory until 1958), turning into a People's Republic after King Michael was forced to abdicate in December 1947⁴⁰.

Until Soviet troops left Romania (1958), we cannot speak of a foreign policy of the communist government in Bucharest. The official position of Bucharest was closely aligned with Moscow's. Romania was a founding member of Comecon, the pseudo-alliance established by the Soviet Union together with its communist satellites in Eastern Europe in 1949, in order to avoid their interest in participating in the Marshall Plan established by the United States after the war. In 1955, Romania was also a founding member of the Warsaw Pact, the military organisation of the communist camp⁴¹. The main turning point during this period was the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, which determined Bucharest's friendlier attitude towards alternative communist regimes, such as those in Yugoslavia and China, and even good relations with France (also a dissident country, but in the Western camp), leading to the establishment of two car factories in Romania⁴². This was the comeback of a special relationship with France, which would develop significantly after 1989.

Also, after the 1968 Prague Spring, Romania's isolation within the communist bloc increased, simultaneously with a warming in the bilateral relation with the United States, uncommon for the latter's attitude towards communist countries⁴³. President Nixon's visit to Romania was the starting point of a special relationship between Romania and the United States, which would consistently expand after 1997.

The 1990s were characterised by a realignment of the country's foreign policy, along with all the other transformations affecting Central and Eastern Europe, especially in what concerns the adoption of liberal democratic political systems and free-market economy. After the dissolution of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact (1991), Romania's governments

supported the tactics of integrating the country into the Western European political, military and economic structures, following a liberal institutionalist logic. There were also opinions in favour of neutrality in 1991-1993, but they did not prevail. Moreover, in 1991 Romania proposed the creation of a Union of Central and Eastern European states as an alternative to the EEC (EU), the UCEE. However, Poland, Hungary, and other states refused this initiative, and instead established the Visegrad Group⁴⁴. Romania became a member of the Council of Europe in 1993 and joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994. It became a candidate for accession to the European Union (1995) and NATO (1999), in order to make alliances with the leading military power (the United States) and with the top European economic powers.

In 1997, following the change of the political regime in Bucharest and the formation of a pro-Western coalition, the relations with France and the United States were taken to a new level. Thus, in the wake of NATO's Madrid Summit of July 1997, Romania signed a strategic partnership with France in order to support its accession to the Alliance. Following the failure of this undertaking in 1997, the partnership was extended to support Romania's accession to the European Union. At the same time, as a consolation for not having joined NATO, the United States agreed to sign a strategic partnership with Romania in order to support its NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP)⁴⁵. These were typical bandwagoning strategies to ensure the support of two great powers for attaining the goal of becoming a member state of the two international organisations.

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States accelerated Romania's accession to NATO. Its geographical position, bordering the Black Sea region and close to the Middle East, made it a suitable operational base for US troops deploying towards Afghanistan and Iraq. At the same time, the Romanian Government openly supported the US global war on terrorism, sometimes at the expense of its relations with its Western European partners, France and Germany⁴⁶. Thus, Romania contributed military contin-

gents to the war in Afghanistan from 2001 until the complete retreat of NATO troops in 2021. Also, it contributed civilian personnel to the Allied intervention in Iraq in 2003, assisting in reconstruction efforts there (Multinational Force – Iraq/MNF-I) until 2009⁴⁷. In 2004, Romania officially became a NATO member. As a sort of reward for its combat efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States decided to deploy troops to four military bases on Romania's territory and also military technology of the Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (the Deveselu Base). The Romanian authorities consider these elements a sufficient deterrent against any potential Russian invasion, which is seen as the most important security threat to the country, as it covers the most important state rivalry in Romania's case during modern and contemporary times (89 years)⁴⁸.

Romania formally became an EU Member State in 2007, but subject to the special clause of the Control and Verification Mechanism (CVM) imposed by the European Commission, which conditioned EU funding upon the alignment of the justice system with European norms and the fight against corruption. Therefore, its status has been perceived by a part of the population (supporting the autochthonism thesis) as a "second rank" member state. For most political parties (which support a westernising position), however, this alignment to a community of norms was a necessary sacrifice to obtain vital EU funding⁴⁹.

Within the European Union, Romania is currently (after Brexit) the sixth-largest country, both in terms of area (238,397 square kilometres) and population (19 million inhabitants). It is entitled to appoint a commissioner to the European Commission and participates, through the president of Romania, in the European Council. At the level of the European Parliament, Romania elects 33 members, thus confirming its status as a medium-sized country (together with the Netherlands), or the "smallest of the largest" and the "largest of the smallest".

In this context, Romania seeks to make the most of its status as EU Member State by aligning itself (bandwagoning) with the leading member states – Germany and France –, while at the same time adopting a reserved position

Table 2 – Results of the Romanian state's strategies

Year/Period:	Balancing:	Buck-passing:	Bandwagoning:	Result:
1877-1878			Alliance with the Russian Empire	Success (independence, gaining Northern Dobruja, losing Southern Bessarabia)
1883			Alliance with the German Empire	Success (insurance of territorial integrity)
1913	Alliance with Serbia, Greece, and Türkiye against Bulgaria			Success (gaining Southern Dobruja)
1916-1918			Alliance with the Entente (France, Russia, and the United Kingdom)	Success (gaining Transylvania and Bessarabia)
1921-1938	Little Entente (with Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia)			Defeat (losing Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Bessarabia to the USSR)
1934-1940	Balkan Pact (with Greece, Türkiye, and Yugoslavia)			Defeat (losing Southern Dobruja)
1941-1944			Alliance with the Axis (Germany, Italy and Japan)	Defeat (among defeated countries after the Second World War – compensations to USSR)
1944-1945			Alliance with USSR	Success (regaining Northern Transylvania from Hungary)
1997-2004			Strategic partnership with the United States	Success (accession to NATO)
1997-2007			Partnership with France	Success (accession to the European Union)
Total:	1 success (33%) 2 defeats (66%)	-	6 successes (86%) 1 defeat (14%)	7 successes (70%) 3 defeats (30%)

towards the EU's military strategic autonomy and preferring instead that this need be addressed through NATO, as is also the case with Poland and the Baltic States. However, Roma-

nia is nowadays a part of the informal group called the "Friends of Cohesion" (established in 2020), together with member states like Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia,

Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain, which aim at preserving the current financing scheme within the EU⁵⁰. They are opposed by another informal group, the “Frugal Four”, made up of Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden, which calls for a reduction of EU funding (in their capacity as net contributors)⁵¹. This could amount to a new alliance strategy for Romania, but it is done in order to gain the support of the major EU countries (Germany, France, and Italy), which have their own national strategies.

Conclusions

The analysis of the Romanian case emphasises a clear preference among decision-makers for bandwagoning (as Table 2 shows), which is obvious in the case of a small state in a region dominated by great powers. Unlike Scandinavian or Alpine countries⁵², Romania could not afford to preserve its neutrality for long (1916-1918 being the exception) and choose a buck-passing strategy. Instead, external factors and the specific strategic culture of the Romanian state led to the choice of certain approaches over others.

Ultimately, the Romanian state opted for alliances with great powers outside the region and expressed distrust towards its neighbours, whom it viewed as competitors within a “zero-sum” regional security context; it chose the military solution only as a last resort and, primarily, in alliance with the great powers, and it joined international organisations mainly to ensure its security by aligning itself with more powerful states, rather than through alliances with smaller states. This attitude was derived above all from a tradition of isolationist policy in the region, coupled with the development of an identity as an outpost of the West – a bridge promoting Western values towards the East – and rarely participating in military operations far from its areas of core interest. It reflects predominantly a neorealist perspective, although one that also supports a liberal institutionalist setting at the European level

and, at least in declarative terms, the norms associated with a social constructivist perspective. The emphasis of such a vision lies in insuring security – generally understood in military and territorial terms – against the threat posed by revisionist great powers. The lesson of the Romanian case for small states would be that it is always preferable to be allied with the strong than to lose together with the weak.

Of course, the findings of this article represent only a sample of the broader reality, being constrained by the limitations of the current national-level research on the subject. However, this article may serve as a starting point for further research into small states in international relations and for drawing lessons from comparing various experiences shaped by particular strategic cultures, in order to identify both the common points in their experiences and the main causes of divergence.

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Trecerea României de la Tratatul de la Varșovia la un nou statut de securitate

Florin-Alin VICLIUC

Abstract

In this article, I have presented a series of considerations related to the major geopolitical events that took place in Eastern Europe during the years 1989-1993 and their impact on Romania. In order to understand this international context, I used the works of specialists in this field. Some experts point out that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union changed the geopolitical position of Romania, placing it in an uncertain and undecided area in terms of its geopolitical orientation. On the other hand, others claim that in 1989, Nicolae Ceaușescu refused to accept the change and to recognise the discontent and interests of the great powers. Thus, the Romanian Revolution of 1989 led to the fall of the communist regime led by Ceaușescu and to significant changes in Romanian society. I described Romania's transition period from the communist regime to the democratic system and the market economy in the years 1989-1993 and how, on the military level, Romania began the reform of the army during this period, with the aim of creating a modern structure, fully professionalised and interoperable with the armies of NATO member states. Objectives were set to develop capacities to simplify command and control procedures and crisis management. Finally, I described the impact of the events of December 1989 on the international situation and Romania's foreign relations. Overall, the article highlights Romania's efforts to align with Western values and initiate the process of integration into NATO security structures following the political and geopolitical changes in Eastern Europe since the early 1990s.

Keywords: Romania, Eastern Europe, Revolution, Warsaw Pact, NATO

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Tema privind tranziția României de la Tratatul de la Varșovia la un nou statut de securitate este esențială pentru reamintirea modului în care statul român și-a redefinit identitatea strategică imediat după 1989, într-un context regional marcat de instabilitate și transformări geopolitice profunde. Alegerea acestei teme se justifică prin relevanța ei pentru analiza proceselor de democratizare, reformă instituțională și re poziționare internațională. Studiul urmărește să examineze evoluțiile politice, militare și diplomatice care au făcut posibilă desprinderea de vechiul sistem de alianțe și orientarea către structurile euroatlantice, cu accent pe dinamica internă a reformelor și pe influențele externe specifice începutului anilor '90. Analiza se bazează pe instrumente specifice cercetării istorico-politice: examinarea documentelor oficiale, interpretarea literaturii de specialitate și evaluarea contextului regional. Totodată, recunoaștem limitele inerente ale cercetării, precum accesul inegal la surse, caracterul încă sensibil al unor aspecte decizionale și dificultatea separării complete între interpretare și memorie instituțională. În ansamblu, demersul își propune să ofere o perspectivă coerentă asupra unui proces complex, aflat la intersecția dintre transformarea internă și presiunile geopolitice externe.

Marius-Cristian Neacșu consideră că prăbușirea Zidului Berlinului, urmată de revoluțiile din Europa Centrală și de Est care au culminat cu dezintegrarea Uniunii Sovietice în 1991, a reprezentat un moment de inflexiune geopolitică majoră, cu efecte directe asupra poziționării internaționale a României. Statul român s-a regăsit atunci într-o „zonă gri”, un spațiu al indeciziei strategice și al așteptării, în care direcția viitoare a fostelor state socialiste rămânea incertă. Nu era clar dacă acestea vor reuși un proces coerent de occidentalizare sau, dimpotrivă, vor reveni în orbita de influență a Kremlinului. La această incertitudine se adăuga și necunoscuta privind capacitatea Rusiei de a se redresa după reculul geopolitic profund generat de prăbușirea URSS, element care amplifică ambiguitatea strategică a întregii regiuni¹. Iar generalul Ion Pitulescu este de părere că, în anul 1989, în contextul transformărilor politice accelerate care marcau Europa Centrală și de Răsărit, Nicolae Ceaușescu – ultimul dintre liderii comuniști tradiționali încă aflat la conducere – a respins categoric orice perspectivă de schimbare. Această atitudine inflexibilă era alimentată de convingerea, cultivată sistematic în interiorul aparatului de partid și de stat, că personalitatea sa „excepțională” îi conferea capacitatea de a desfășura o politică autonomă la scară globală. În consecință, Ceaușescu a ignorat atât acumularea vizibilă a nemulțumirilor interne, cât și dinamica externă, marcată de negocieri, re poziționări și jocuri de interese între marile puteri, care redefiniseră deja arhitectura geopolitică a regiunii².

1. Revoluția și sfârșitul regimului comunist din România

Revoluția din România din 1989 a marcat sfârșitul regimului comunist condus de Nicolae Ceaușescu și a avut consecințe semnificative asupra istoriei și societății românești. România era în acea perioadă una dintre cele mai opresive și autoritare țări din blocul estic. Nicolae Ceaușescu conducea regimul comunist de peste 20 de ani, iar politica sa centralizată și dictatorială a cauzat suferință și nemulțumire în rândul populației. Restricțiile severe asupra

libertății de exprimare, lipsa drepturilor civile și condițiile economice precare au alimentat nemulțumirea în societate. Revoluția a început în Timișoara, unde un protest, inițial împotriva evacuării unui pastor reformat, a evoluat rapid într-un val de nemulțumire generalizată împotriva regimului comunist³. Represiunea violentă exercitată de forțele de securitate asupra protestatarilor a stârnit și mai multă furie și a condus la creșterea în intensitate a revoltei. Protestele au continuat să se răspândească în alte orașe din România, cum ar fi București, Cluj-Napoca și Sibiu. Oamenii au ieșit în stradă pentru a cere schimbarea regimului și eliberarea de sub jugul comunist. Forțele de securitate au răspuns cu violență, iar mulți oameni au fost uciși sau răniți în confruntări. Pe 21 decembrie 1989, în timpul unei adunări publice la București, Nicolae și Elena Ceaușescu au fost întrerupți de protestele unei mulțimi furioase. Sub presiunea manifestanților și cu sprijinul armatei, cuplul a fugit, dar a fost capturat ulterior⁴. În urma unui proces sumar, Nicolae și Elena Ceaușescu au fost executați la 25 decembrie 1989.

După execuție, Consiliul Frontului Salvării Naționale (CFSN), o coaliție politică provizorie, a preluat puterea în România. A fost format un nou guvern și au fost inițiate reforme democratice și economice. După decembrie 1989, atitudinea externă față de România a fost determinată de aprecierea dată pe plan internațional răsturnării regimului comunist, iar perspectiva dezvoltării democratice a făcut ca România să se bucure de multă simpatie și de sprijin pe plan internațional. În scurt timp, însă, atitudinea principalilor factori de putere din Europa și din lume față de România s-a schimbat, ea fiind acum determinată nu de evenimentele din decembrie 1989 ca atare, ci de imaginea răspândită în exterior cu privire la puterea instaurată în țară după aceste evenimente. Spre deosebire de alte țări foste socialiste, în România nu au venit la putere forțe politice de dreapta, ci o grupare de centru-stânga, cu largă audiență publică, iar Occidentul și-a diminuat repede și în mare măsură sprijinul față de România. S-a luat, astfel, cursul marginalizării României în viața internațională, al limitării ostentative a contactelor

oficiale, mai ales a celor de nivel ridicat, cu țara noastră, al obstrucționării admiterii sale în Consiliul Europei și perfectării aranjamentelor cu Uniunea Europeană, creării a tot felul de obstacole în accesul său la resursele organismelor financiare internaționale⁵.

După evenimentele din decembrie 1989, forțele armate, ca și alte instituții ale statului, s-au confruntat cu o anumită criză de legitimitate și de identitate⁶. Anterior, existau trei categorii de autorități: comandanți, loțiitori politici și ofițeri de securitate. Cele trei categorii de autorități au făcut obiectul disputelor și criticilor. De exemplu, greva spontană a ofițerilor din garnizoana București, care au manifestat în fața guvernului și au cerut schimbări în organizarea armatei și a profesiei militare; apariția primelor forme de mișcări sindicale în unele unități militare; apariția, la nivel central, a unor organizații profesionale precum Comitetul de acțiune pentru democratizarea armatei (CADA). Membrii CADA au acționat timp de câteva luni ca un organism care reprezenta punctele de vedere ale personalului militar, participând la negocieri privind probleme politice importante din cadrul organizației militare și încercând să aducă unele schimbări în organizarea și funcționarea acesteia. CADA a apărut deci ca reacție la despotismul introdus în organizația militară imediat după revoluție, dar nu a avut un cadru instituțional pentru activitățile sale. Astfel, în absența unui cadru instituțional, și-a încetat activitatea⁷. O dispută era aceea cu privire la ideea celor „două securități”, una cominternistă și alta patriotică, dar, bazându-se pe argumente științifice, istoricul și filosoful Vladimir Tismăneanu a respins ferm această teză și a subliniat crimele sistemului totalitar. Tismăneanu descrie tranziția ca un proces complex, cu provocări precum declinul clasei politice și naționalismul toxic, dar cu progrese reale în privința drepturilor cetățenești⁸.

După decembrie 1989 conducerea instituției militare s-a confruntat cu o serie de probleme, precum necesitatea reformulării misiunilor forțelor armate, ținând cont de dinamica de securitate de la nivel regional, necesitatea reducerii forțelor armate conform cerințelor impuse de acordurile internaționale la care România lua parte, reformularea rolului și

locului organizației militare în raport cu societatea civilă și a relației sale cu decidentul politic, necesitatea menținerii unității interne și a coerenței operaționale în cadrul instituțiilor militare, respectiv crearea premiselor pentru integrarea în structura euroatlantică⁹.

2. Adaptarea României la sistemul democratic și economia de piață

Între 1989 și 1991, instituțiile statului român și elitele politice au perpetuat reflexele doctrinare ale vechiului regim, menținând o dependență structurală față de paradigma estică într-un moment în care alte state din regiune accelerau procesele de democratizare și re poziționare strategică. În sprijinul acestui fapt, prima declarație, emisă la 22 decembrie 1989 de CFSN, a stabilit principiile care vor ghida politica românească în epoca postcomunistă. Obiectivele și prioritățile de politică externă ale noii României democratizate au dezvăluit clar situația haotică în care se aflau politicienii români la acea vreme: „Întreaga politică externă a țării trebuie să servească promovării bunei vecinătăți, integrându-se în procesul de construire a unei Europe unite, o casă comună a tuturor popoarelor continentului. Vom respecta angajamentele internaționale ale României și, mai presus de toate, cele referitoare la Tratatul de la Varșovia.” Uniunea Europeană (UE) și Organizația Tratatului de la Varșovia (OTV) erau două organizații care susțineau principii diametral opuse. Din punct de vedere geopolitic, Europa Unită și OTV, la care se face referire în document, reflectă cu exactitate poziția incertă a României de la acea vreme¹⁰. Mai mult decât atât, în luna aprilie 1991, România semna „Tratatul de bună vecinătate, cooperare și prietenie cu URSS”, unde, la articolul 4, era menționat faptul că „România și Uniunea Republicilor Socialiste Sovietice nu vor participa la nicio alianță îndreptată împotriva celuilalt”, dar Uniunea Sovietică avea să se prăbușească la scurt timp. Din fericire, tratatul nu a fost niciodată ratificat de Parlamentul român. Cu toate acestea, încercarea de a trece o astfel de lege a fost un indicator vizibil al inerției influenței sovietice vechi și de

lungă durată asupra politicienilor români din acea perioadă. Aceștia se temeau, în contextul dizolvării URSS, de noutatea pe care o va aduce democrația. Desigur, dacă tratatul ar fi fost ratificat de Parlament, poate că țara noastră nu ar fi devenit niciodată membră a Organizației Tratatului Atlanticului de Nord (NATO)¹¹.

Intervalul 1989-1993 a constituit o etapă crucială pentru adaptarea României la sistemul democratic și economia de piață după sfârșitul regimului comunist. După căderea regimului comunist, România a început un proces de tranziție politică către un sistem democratic. S-au organizat alegeri libere și pluraliste, iar partidele politice concurente au apărut și au început să-și consolideze poziția. Au fost adoptate noi legi și constituția a fost revizuită pentru a reflecta principiile democratice și pentru a garanta drepturile și libertățile fundamentale ale cetățenilor. Odată cu tranziția către economia de piață, România a început un proces de reformă economică semnificativă. Au fost eliminate treptat mecanismele economiei centralizate și s-au introdus elemente ale economiei de piață. Au fost luate măsuri pentru privatizarea întreprinderilor de stat și liberalizarea comerțului. Au fost stabilite politici fiscale și monetare noi pentru a crea un mediu propice investițiilor și creșterii economice. Oamenii au trebuit să se adapteze la schimbările economice, care au adus creșterea șomajului și scăderea nivelului de trai în anumite perioade. S-au făcut eforturi pentru a asigura protecția socială și pentru a sprijini sectoarele vulnerabile ale populației în timpul tranziției. Transformarea organizației militare, concretizată în reforme, a început imediat după evenimentele din decembrie 1989, dar s-a conturat mai clar începând cu anul 2000. Obiectivul principal al transformării organizației militare a fost acela de a dobândi noi capacități pentru a face față diferitelor provocări ale mediului de securitate actual și viitor¹². Obiectivul general al transformării organizațiilor militare este acela de a obține o structură mobilă, eficientă, flexibilă, detașabilă, durabilă, complet specializată și interoperabilă într-o gamă largă de misiuni. Pentru a atinge obiectivele de mai sus, forțele armate ale statelor membre NATO au formulat un set coerent de obiective menite să asigure interoperabilitatea, modernizarea și alinierea democratică a structurilor militare

ale statelor partenere. Aceste obiective au vizat atât transformări instituționale, cât și reforme doctrinare și operaționale, necesare pentru integrarea într-un sistem de securitate colectivă occidentală¹³.

Istoricul Lucian Boia este de părere că, în această perioadă de tranziție timpurie, România s-a confruntat cu o serie de dificultăți politice structurale, reflectate în fragmentarea partidelor, instabilitatea guvernelor și competiția intensă pentru influență în noile instituții democratice. Procesul de democratizare a fost marcat de tensiuni, ezitări și conflicte interne, întrucât vechile reflexe politice coexistau cu noile aspirații democratice. Elita politică – și, în mare măsură, cea intelectuală – provenea din perioada comunistă, aspect ce reprezenta o realitate istorică, nu o judecată de valoare. Această continuitate a generat atât inerții instituționale, cât și o nevoie accentuată de legitimare a noului regim, cu atât mai puternică într-un context în care schimbarea fusese produsă printr-o ruptură bruscă. Legitimarea presupunea, inevitabil, reconectarea la o tradiție istorică, prin care noua putere să își ancoreze existența într-o narațiune coerentă a statului român.

În acest cadru, armata a încercat să reia firul istoric întrerupt brutal după cel de-Al Doilea Război Mondial, revendicând continuitatea cu vechea armată română și distanțându-se de modelul militar sovietic. În plan politic, Partidul Comunist nu a dispărut printr-o ruptură reală, ci a trecut printr-un proces de volatilizare, în sensul că structurile sale formale s-au dizolvat, însă numeroși foști activiști au rămas în poziții de putere, asigurând o continuitate semnificativă în mecanismele de decizie¹⁴.

Din 1990, România a cunoscut transformări majore care au schimbat fundamental natura și dezvoltarea societății. Aceste transformări nu numai că au schimbat viziunea de ansamblu asupra modului în care trebuie sprijinit economic sectorul social, dar au crescut, de asemenea, incidența diferitelor riscuri sociale la niveluri fără precedent. Strategiile sunt în mod constant revizuite și necesită o adaptare permanentă. În același timp, sistemele vitale pentru funcționarea vieții economice și sociale, sisteme cu o dezvoltare tehnologică rapidă și o interconectare accelerată se află sub observația unor vectori, grupuri și organizații

extremiste și teroriste. În fața unor astfel de tensiuni și complexități, securitatea actorilor statali și a comunității internaționale în ansamblu depinde de capacitatea lor de a reacționa și, mai ales, de a acționa în mod proactiv. Cu toate acestea, tranziția României a fost un proces complex și continuu, cu provocări și obstacole care necesită eforturi constante pentru a fi depășite. Corupția, inegalitățile sociale, problemele economice și politice au reprezentat provocări importante pe parcursul acestui proces¹⁵.

În concluzie, adaptarea României la sistemul democratic și economia de piață în perioada 1989-1993 a implicat transformări semnificative, dar procesul a fost unul continuu și complex, care a necesitat eforturi susținute pe mai mulți ani. România a înregistrat progrese în consolidarea democrației și a economiei de piață, dar provocările și transformările au continuat și au reprezentat o parte importantă a evoluției ulterioare a țării, iar prioritatea politică centrală a României postcomuniste a fost integrarea în structurile euroatlantice. În mod particular, parcursul României către obiectivul strategic al aderării la NATO a fost modelat de o combinație complexă de factori politici, instituționali și istorici. Direcția pro-occidentală asumată a depins în mod decisiv de inițiativele generației politice care a transformat integrarea euroatlantică într-un proiect național, dar și de constrângerile generate de moștenirea recentului regim comunist și de dinamica specifică perioadei de tranziție¹⁶.

3. Tranziția către NATO. Redefinirea statutului de securitate

Evenimentele din decembrie 1989 au produs o schimbare bruscă și radicală în situația internațională și raporturile externe ale României. În câteva luni, o parte semnificativă a structurilor politice, politico-militare (de securitate) și economice din România (și din alte țări din Europa Centrală și de Est) s-a prăbușit. Prin dispariția Tratatului de la Varșovia și a aranjamentelor politice și de securitate existente între fostele țări socialiste europene, în regiune s-a creat un vid de securitate, care a afectat în grade diferite toate statele est și cen-

tral-europene. Pericolele acestui vid de securitate au fost amplificate de reluarea, în condițiile încetării *Războiului Rece*, a politicii sferelor de influență a marilor puteri, de pozițiile manifestate, direct sau indirect, declarat sau tacit, atât în Est, cât și în Vest, în favoarea revizuirii tratatelor de pace încheiate la Paris după Primul Război Mondial, precum și de recrudescența naționalismului, inclusiv a naționalismului agresiv, cu un mare potențial destabilizator și conflictual¹⁷.

În iunie 1990, ambasadorul României la Moscova, Vasile Șandru, a trimis o telegramă ministrului de externe, Adrian Năstase. Telegrama conținea informații din partea adjunctului ministrului de externe sovietic, despre dialogul URSS-SUA cu privire la relațiile OTV-NATO. Discuțiile au vizat coordonarea relațiilor dintre cele două structuri, asigurarea unui nou cadru pentru garantarea cooperării în domeniul securității pe continentul european, îndeplinirea obligațiilor asumate prin Carta ONU și în cadrul Comisiei pentru Securitate și Cooperare în Europa (CSCE), reunificarea Germaniei și înființarea unui organism permanent de consultări politice și militare. Prin urmare, OTV și NATO nu se mai vedeau ca adversari și erau gata să coopereze, cel puțin la nivel de declarații¹⁸.

Statele din Europa Centrală și de Est, deși aveau în proximitate exemple consolidate de neutralitate pe continent, nu au optat pentru acest model strategic după prăbușirea sistemului bipolar. Fostele membre ale Tratatului de la Varșovia au ales, în schimb, să își manifeste explicit orientarea către apropierea de NATO¹⁹, după ce Alianța Nord-Atlantică a transmis Mesajul de la Turnberry din 7-8 iunie 1990: „Noi, miniștrii de Externe ai Alianței, ne exprimăm hotărârea de a profita de oportunitățile istorice care rezultă din schimbările profunde din Europa pentru a ajuta la construirea unei noi ordini pașnice în Europa, întemeiate pe libertate și democrație. În acest spirit, întindem Uniunii Sovietice și tuturor celorlalte țări europene mâna prieteniei și a cooperării.” Progresele în domeniul parteneriatului și al dialogului politic cu fostele state membre ale OTV au luat avânt o lună mai târziu, grație unei propuneri prezentate la reuniunea la nivel înalt de la Londra din 5-6 iulie 1990. Prin

adoptarea „Declarației de la Londra privind o Alianță Nord-Atlantică transformată”, șefii de stat și de guvern și-au exprimat hotărârea de a transforma Alianța în conformitate cu noile realități și de a face un pas important pentru a pune capăt conflictului Est-Vest. Ei au trimis oferte guvernelor Uniunii Sovietice și statelor Europei Centrale și de Est, pentru a stabili legături diplomatice regulate cu NATO și pentru inițierea unei noi relații bazate pe cooperare. Astfel, în perioada 1990-1993, România a început să facă tranziția către NATO și și-a redefinit statutul de securitate prin întreprinderea de măsuri și acțiuni concrete²⁰.

Dizolvarea „lagărului socialist”, inclusiv a „brațului lui înarmat” (OTV), a adus România într-o situație de mari riscuri de securitate, într-o zonă cu o situație volatilă și cu amenințări clare împotriva intereselor românești. Forța militară a României era, în ciuda efectivelor în număr ridicat, relativ slab pregătită. Aceasta se datora, în primul rând, folosirii efectivelor militare, spre sfârșitul epocii comuniste în special ca o „armată a muncii” și mai puțin pentru rolul lor natural, ceea ce a condus la reducerea timpului afectat instruirii militare și la o relativă neglijare a întreținerii și a modernizării tehnicii din dotare. La această situație se adăugau percepțiile din perioada anterioară legate de lipsa de încredere pentru eventualul aliat român, generată de comportamentele din cursul războaielor mondiale. Un rol care nu poate fi neglijat pentru această rezervă l-au avut și greșelile conducerii politice din perioada de început a reconstrucției democratice, inclusiv reprimarea dură a unor mișcări din perioada imediat următoare răsturnării regimului comunist. Pornind de la situația militară precară, singura posibilitate de asigurare a securității României, care oricum nu avea capacitatea să își asigure singură apărarea națională²¹ în fața unei agresiuni a unei mari puteri, consta în aderarea la o alianță militară²².

În acest context, România a început să dezvolte un dialog și o cooperare mai strânsă cu NATO. Au fost inițiate schimburi de experiență, vizite reciproce și programe de pregătire comună cu aliații din NATO. În iulie 1990, primul-ministru Petre Roman i-a adresat, în scris, secretarului general al NATO, Manfred Wörner, invitația de a vizita România, cu propunerea de acreditare a unui ambasador român la

NATO. În octombrie 1990, ambasadorul român în Belgia a fost autorizat să inițieze relații diplomatice cu NATO²³; în aceeași lună, primul-ministru român s-a întâlnit, la Bruxelles, cu secretarul general al NATO²⁴, Manfred Wörner, care va face două vizite în România. În cadrul primei vizite, efectuată în perioada 3-5 iulie 1991, Manfred Wörner a fost primit de președintele Ion Iliescu și a avut întâlniri cu ministrul afacerilor externe, Adrian Năstase, și ministrul apărării naționale, Nicolae Spiroiu. La Parlamentul României, secretarul general al NATO a avut întâlniri cu președinții celor două Camere și cu liderii grupurilor parlamentare. În decembrie 1991, ministrul român al afacerilor externe a participat la prima întâlnire a Consiliului de Cooperare Nord-Atlantic²⁵. În perioada 21-22 februarie 1992, Manfred Wörner a revenit în România pentru inaugurarea Centrului Euro-Atlantic de la București²⁶. Toate acestea au permis României să se familiarizeze cu valorile, practicile și standardele NATO și să se alinieze cu ele.

În această perioadă, România a efectuat reforme semnificative în sectorul său de apărare, în conformitate cu cerințele și standardele NATO. Aceste reforme au vizat modernizarea și restructurarea armatei, consolidarea controlului civil asupra forțelor armate și alinierea la normele și procedurile NATO. România a fost activă în participarea la exerciții militare și programe de instruire organizate de NATO în această perioadă. În 1993, a fost lansat programul MIL-TO-MIL pentru a sprijini armata română în vederea îmbunătățirii relațiilor dintre forțele americane și cele românești²⁷. De asemenea, a fost creată o echipă militară de legătură între Armata Română și Comandamentul European al Armatei SUA (EUCOM)²⁸. Prin intermediul acestor activități, România a dezvoltat interoperabilitatea cu forțele NATO și și-a consolidat capacitatea de apărare.

Procesul de evoluție a organizației militare românești a trecut prin mai multe etape, fiecare cu obiective specifice. Prima fază a avut loc între 1990 și 1993 și a avut ca scop depolitizarea și ajustarea structurală rapidă a forțelor armate. În acest scop, au fost luate mai multe măsuri: retragerea din Pactul de la Varșovia²⁹, dezmembrarea structurilor care vizează OTV și desființarea structurilor politice existente în cadrul forțelor armate; desființarea

structurilor care vizează funcționarea în economia națională; reformarea întregii structuri organizaționale și a cadrului de reglementare pentru controlul societății civile asupra instituțiilor militare; stabilirea unui nou cadru juridic pentru organizarea și funcționarea instituțiilor militare în cadrul statului de drept; punerea în aplicare a măsurilor Convenției de la Paris; stabilirea unui cadru juridic și a unei structuri de forțe pentru participarea la misiuni externe desfășurate sub egida ONU; inițierea unor programe de echipare a instituțiilor militare; reorganizarea structurii forțelor prin eliminarea organizării pe eșaloane de tip divizie/regiment și adoptarea celei de tip corp de armată/brigadă/batalion.³⁰

Prima misiune în afara frontierelor naționale³¹ de după Revoluția din 1989 a fost lansată la 9 februarie 1991, ca parte a forței coalitiei multinaționale care a participat, în conformitate cu Rezoluția 678 a Consiliului de Securitate al ONU, la operațiunea Desert Storm în regiunea Golfului Persic. Spitalul de campanie nr. 100 era o unitate medicală de grad 3, organizată conform unui nou concept în care zonele critice (săli de operație, săli de examinare, vestiare și camere de control medical) erau amplasate în containere standard, găzduind 100 de paturi și fiind încadrată de 384 de voluntari, civili și militari. Participarea armatei române la misiune a fost rezultatul negocierilor între guvernele român și britanic și aprobării ulterioare de către Parlamentul României. Această misiune a reprezentat prima cooperare militară într-un context real între o unitate a forțelor armate, care până în 1990 a fost integrată în OTV, și organizația militară a unui stat membru NATO³².

În perioada 1990-1993, România a început să facă tranziția către NATO și și-a redefinit statutul de securitate prin reforme structurale în sectorul de apărare, dezvoltarea cooperării și dialogului cu NATO, respectiv participarea la exerciții și programe NATO. Aceste măsuri și acțiuni au fost etape importante ale parcursului României către aderarea la NATO, un pas decisiv fiind reprezentat de formularea cererii de aderare în anul 1993³³. Istoricul britanic Dennis Deletant a subliniat importanța NATO ca garanție de securitate pentru țări ca România, notând că statele ex-socialiste trebu-

iau să adere mai întâi la NATO pentru a oferi garanții de securitate înainte de integrarea în UE. Totodată, Deletant a evidențiat mentalitatea postcomunistă inițială de evitare a provocării Federației Ruse și a apreciat că „e meritul conducerilor României că au încercat permanent să convingă administrațiile americane despre pericolul pe care îl reprezintă Rusia la Marea Neagră”³⁴.

În loc de concluzii

La sfârșitul celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial, România a fost inclusă în sfera de influență sovietică și a devenit parte a Tratatului de la Varșovia, alianța militară a țărilor comuniste, iar până în 1965 politica externă a fost subordonată Uniunii Sovietice. Totodată, România a avut parte de o supunere strictă față de politica și interesele sovietice, în timp ce libertatea, democrația și integrarea europeană erau utopii. Parcursul României, de la statutul de membru al Tratatului de la Varșovia la cel de membru NATO, reprezintă o evoluție semnificativă și o transformare profundă în domeniul securității și al politicii externe a țării. Această călătorie a fost caracterizată de o serie de schimbări politice, economice și militare, care au avut un impact semnificativ asupra societății românești și asupra relațiilor internaționale.

Cu toate acestea, Revoluția din 1989 a reprezentat un punct de cotitură major în istoria României. Căderea regimului comunist și începutul tranziției către democrație și economie de piață au marcat începutul unei noi ere în dezvoltarea României. În această perioadă, România a depus eforturi considerabile pentru a se reorienta către valorile și standardele occidentale și pentru a se integra în structurile euroatlantice³⁵.

Transformarea organizației militare românești a pornit de la premisa unei abordări potențiale a unui nou mod de a purta războiul și a condus la schimbări semnificative în conținutul conceptului operațional, al structurii forțelor, al sistemelor de planificare și al bugetării. Reforma militară de după 1989 a fost o evoluție firească, constând mai întâi într-o perspectivă conceptuală și atitudinală, urmată

de o reevaluare structurală, operațională și infrastructurală și continuând cu reorganizarea instituției militare³⁶.

Cu toate acestea, drumul României de la OTV la NATO a fost marcat de dificultăți și fragilități. Printre obstacolele politice s-au numărat necesitatea de a efectua reforme structurale în domeniul apărării și de a consolida statul de drept și instituțiile democratice. În plus, modernizarea organizației militare în orice stat ar trebui să reprezinte un argument pentru securitate, un factor de descurajare și de întărire a apărării, precum și unul de prevenire controlată a conflictelor și de gestionare constructivă a crizelor³⁷.

Regiunile centrale și estice ale Europei continentale ocupă un loc important în istorie, fiind unul dintre principalele câmpuri de luptă ale celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial. România, situată pe axa munților Carpați, a Dunării și a Mării Negre, are o poziție geografică avantajoasă din punct de vedere strategic la scară istorică, dar, în același timp, cu un cost enorm. În acest sens, urmând teoria lui Xenopol cu privire la evoluțiile istorice cu caracter spiralat³⁸, putem afirma că „întocmai această ecuație a poziționării României în spațiu determină temporal o urgență ciclică a unor ciocniri de interese, fie ele interne ori externe”³⁹.

Mediul de securitate actual este caracterizat de lipsă de previzibilitate și un grad ridicat de incertitudine, cu amenințări netradiționale, dinamice și adesea aleatorii, care apar fără constrângeri sau reguli. Acest lucru face ca găsirea unui echilibru optim între ambițiile politice și resursele țărilor să fie o provocare constantă; perspectivele pentru NATO și România sunt pozitive, iar cooperarea rămâne importantă într-un mediu internațional complex și în continuă evoluție⁴⁰.

Leadershipul național trebuie să dea dovadă de responsabilitate și maturitate, să privească cu realism și înțelepciune către viitorul națiunii, într-o lume complexă, marcată de provocări și situații conjuncturale. Iar, în ceea ce privește domeniul apărării, dat fiind faptul că avem o dezvoltare constantă, determinanță pentru construcția de capabilități moderne, precum și a costurilor operaționale, va fi tot mai dificilă susținerea unui nivel de ambiție rezonabil fără cooperare la nivel bilateral, re-

gional sau euroatlantic. NATO și România vor trebui să se adapteze la noile provocări și amenințări de securitate, care includ, printre altele, consolidarea capacităților de apărare cibernetică, combaterea dezinformării și propagandei Federației Ruse, precum și gestionarea provocărilor regionale, cum ar fi securitatea în regiunea Mării Negre⁴¹.

În plan regional, România a susținut în mod constant acordarea unei atenții sporite, în cadrul NATO, în ceea ce privește riscurile la care se expun țările vecine NATO și consolidarea unei înțelegeri comune a acestor amenințări prin intermediul dialogului în interiorul Alianței. Prin aceste solicitări, România caută să se asigure că NATO acordă atenția cuvenită Regiunii Extinse a Mării Negre, o regiune de o importanță strategică incontestabilă⁴².

Indiscutabil, cercetarea evoluției securității și apărării României, în context aliat, este un demers continuu, având în vedere transformarea constantă a NATO în fața provocărilor de securitate. Consider că este necesară o abordare aprofundată a acestei teme, dată fiind relevanța sa pentru politicile de securitate națională, regională și internațională. Categorical, o abordare nonliniară a temei în care să fie surprinse mai multe perspective, prin studiul autorilor români, dar și a celor străini, din diverse domenii științifice și funcționale, va asigura un rezultat final care va contribui la îmbunătățirea cunoașterii, deoarece educația trebuie să fie, de departe, proiectul public prioritar al României din perspectiva integrării sale în structuri politico-militare și economice, europene și euroatlantice, miza istorică fiind integrarea într-un sistem de valori care să permită dezvoltarea continuă și durabilă a României⁴³.

Note

¹ Marius-Cristian Neacșu, *România 1918-2018. Un secol de frământări politice*, Editura ASE, București, 2018, p. 40.

² Ion Pitulescu, *Șase zile care au zguduit România. Ministerul de interne în decembrie 1989*, Editura Luceafărul, București, 1995, p. 53.

³ Ion Pitulescu, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

⁴ Ion Pitulescu, *op.cit.*, p. 168.

⁵ Constantin Florea, *Starea națiunii 1918-1996. Concluzii și opțiuni pentru România de mâine*,

pentru viitorul poporului român, Editura Fundației România de Măine, București, 1996, p. 122.

⁶ Claudiu Nicolae, *Schimbarea organizației militare. O perspectivă (neo)instituționalistă*, Editura Tritonic, București, 2004, p. 91.

⁷ Claudiu Nicolae, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Despre comunism. Des-tinul unei religii politice*, Editura Humanitas, Bu-curești, 2011, p. 12.

⁹ Marian-Ștefan Zaharia, *Aspecte privind orga-nizația militară din România înainte de anul 1989 și după anul 1989*, în *Buletinul Universității Națio-nale de Apărare „Carol I”*, nr. 4, 2013, p. 83.

¹⁰ Mirela Atanasiu, *Evoluția relațiilor politi-co-militare româno-ruse post-1989*, în *Revista de Științe Militare*, nr. 2, 2018, p. 96-97.

¹¹ Mirela Atanasiu, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

¹² Articolul 119 din Legea fundamentală regle-mentează cadrul legal prin care Consiliul Suprem de Apărare a Țării „organizează și coordonează uni-tar activitățile care privesc apărarea țării și securita-tea națională, participarea la menținerea securității internaționale și la apărarea colectivă în sistemele de alianță militară, precum și la acțiuni de menține-re sau restabilire a păcii”.

¹³ Marian-Ștefan Zaharia, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁴ Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința ro-mânească*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2010, p. 456-457.

¹⁵ Alexandra-Iulia Băloi, *Politica de securitate a României*, în *Sociologie Românească*, nr. 1, 2021, p. 173.

¹⁶ Marina Penciu, *Drumul României către NATO: Percepția candidaturii românești în presa Euro-Atlantică*, în *Muzeul Național*, nr. 26, 2014, p. 334.

¹⁷ Constantin Florea, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁸ *Documente Diplomatie Române*, Seria a III-a, Volum realizat de Mioara Anton, Editura Alpha MDN, București, 2009, p. 1207.

¹⁹ Constantin Florea, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

²⁰ Marina Penciu, *Evoluția procesului de extin-dere a NATO după sfârșitul Războiului Rece (1990-1999)*, în *Muzeul Național*, nr. 27, 2015, p. 326.

²¹ Legea apărării naționale a României nr. 45/1994 prezintă apărarea ca fiind ansamblul de măsuri și activități adoptate și desfășurate de statul român, care au ca scop garantarea suveranității naționale, independența și unitatea statului, integritatea teri-torială a țării și democrația constituțională. Pentru detalii a se vedea Monitorul Oficial nr. 172 din 7 iu-lie 1994.

²² Mircea-Bogdan Uleia, *A fost, este și va fi ne-cesară participarea României la operațiile multi-*

naționale?, în *Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”*, nr. 2, 2014, p. 87-88.

²³ Mihail Ionescu, Șerban Cioculescu, Ovidiu Fizeșan, Cerasela Moldoveanu, Teodor Repciuc, Carmen Rînovceanu, Maria Sinescu, Oana Vasile, Ruxandra Vidrașcu, Lucia Vreja, *România-NATO. Cronologie 1989-2004*, Editura Militară, București, 2004, p. 47.

²⁴ Costin Scurtu, *NATO și România, drumul de la inamici la aliați (1949-2004)*, în *Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis*, nr. 3, 2012, p. 508.

²⁵ Marina Penciu, *Evoluția procesului de extin-dere a NATO după sfârșitul Războiului Rece (1990-1999)*, în *Muzeul Național*, nr. 27, 2015, p. 327.

²⁶ Costin Scurtu, *op.cit.*, p. 509.

²⁷ Se informau reciproc despre structura, perso-nalul, conducerea, pregătirea și echipamentul arma-tei.

²⁸ Constantin Moștofle, *România-NATO. 1990-2002*, Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, București, 2002, p. 153.

²⁹ La 6 februarie 1991, MAE al României se pronunță, printr-o declarație, pentru desființarea structurilor militare ale Tratatului de la Varșovia.

³⁰ Marian-Ștefan Zaharia, *Aspecte privind orga-nizația militară din România înainte de anul 1989 și după anul 1989*, în *Buletinul Universității Națio-nale de Apărare „Carol I”*, nr. 4, 2013, p. 84-85.

³¹ Mihail Ionescu, Șerban Cioculescu, Ovidiu Fizeșan, Cerasela Moldoveanu, Teodor Repciuc, Carmen Rînovceanu, Maria Sinescu, Oana Vasile, Ruxandra Vidrașcu, Lucia Vreja, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

³² Manuel Stănescu, *Armata României în misiuni internaționale*, în *Revista de istorie militară*, nr. 1-2, 2013, p. 70.

³³ Mihail Niemesch, *NATO-organizație politi-co-militară, euro-atlantică și rolul său în asigurarea păcii și securității omenirii*, în *Conferința Internați-onală de Drept, Studii Europene și Relații Internați-onale*, nr. 2, 2014, p. 186.

³⁴ [https://www.dw.com/ro/interviu-cu-profesorul -britanic-dennis-deletant-rom%C3%A2nii-trebuie-s%C4%83-fac%C4%83-mai-mult-pentru-propriul-lor-interes/a-65557705?utm](https://www.dw.com/ro/interviu-cu-profesorul-britanic-dennis-deletant-rom%C3%A2nii-trebuie-s%C4%83-fac%C4%83-mai-mult-pentru-propriul-lor-interes/a-65557705?utm), accesat la data de 12.03.2026.

³⁵ Alexandra-Iulia Băloi, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

³⁶ Marian-Ștefan Zaharia, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Xenopol susține că istoria nu se repetă identic, dar nici nu avansează în mod rectiliniu. Evoluțiile is-torice au o structură spiralată, ceea ce înseamnă că anumite tipare, tensiuni sau fenomene reapar, însă la un alt nivel de dezvoltare, într-un context modificat; a se vedea Mihai Popa, *Conceptul lui A.D. Xenopol de*

serie istorică și progresul spiritual, în *Studii de istorie a filosofiei românești*, vol. XXI: *Perspective conceptual-lexicale*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2025, p. 90-99.

³⁹ Oana-Mădălina Mihăilă, Andreea Mironescu, *Bătălia giganților – ce-i rămâne României*, în *Etnosfera*, nr. 2, 2012, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Dragoș Gabriel Ghercioiu, *Considerații privind inițiativele de cooperare politico-militară în plan bilateral*, în *Monitor Strategic*, nr. 1-2, 2013, p. 111.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Bogdan Aurescu, *Actualitatea Tratatului de la Washington pentru România la un deceniu de la aderarea la NATO*, în *Impact strategic*, nr. 2, 2014, p. 11.

⁴³ Pentru mai multe detalii privind interoperabilitatea educațională în contextul provocărilor globale, a se vedea Dan Colesniuc, *Educația de Intelligence, inovare strategică*, în *Conferința științifică internațională „Gândirea militară românească”*, 2019, <https://gmr.mapn.ro/pages/arhiva-revistei> accesat la data de 12.03.2026.

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